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MR. and Mrs. GERMAN REED'S ENTERTAINMENT, under the Management of Mr. ALFRED GERMAN REED and Mr. CORNEY GRAIN.—TO-DAY, at 3.0, AN ODD PAIR, by Malcolm Watson, music by A. J. Caldicott. Followed by BY ROAD AND RAIL: a New Musical Sketch, by Mr. CORNEY GRAIN. Concluding with THE UGLY DUCKLING, a Musical Comedietta, written and composed by Mr. Corney Grain. Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, at 3.0; Monday, Wednesday, Friday, at 8.0. Stalls, 5s., 3s.; admission, 2s., 1s.—ST. GEORGE'S HALL, Langham-place, W.

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MR. CORNEY GRAIN, TO-DAY, at 4.15, in his New Musical Sketch, BY ROAD AND RAIL, and a Musical Comedietta, THE UGLY DUCKLING. Characters by Miss Fanny Holland, Miss Gertrude Chandler, Mr. Avalon Collard, Mr. Arthur Helmore, and Mr. Corney Grain.

EGYPTIAN HALL.—Lessee and Manager, Mr. J. N. MASKELYNE.—ENGLAND'S HOME of MYSTERY. The cemetery of superstition and imposture, the birthplace of every Optical and Mechanical Mystery, really new in principle, that has been invented during the present generation. The premier Magical Entertainment of the world, now commemorating its 21st consecutive year in London. Performances Daily, at Three and Eight. Reserved seats, 5s. and 3s.; area, 2s. The best 1s. balcony in London, in point of view equal to the dress-circle of a theatre. Children under Twelve half-price.

EGYPTIAN HALL.—GREAT SUCCESS of the NEW PROGRAMME

In "Dr. Mirabel's Theory," by Rose C[illegible]
Three Vols. Bentley and [illegible]
[illegible] (an unfortunate name for [illegible]
remarkable credulity) makes the surpr[illegible]
statement that men of the "highest sci[illegible]
[illegible] consider that the hy[illegible]
[illegible] which we have found a good
[illegible] been proved to be a dispute."
motion plays a singularly hideous part
story, and Dr. Lancaster, after he has found
that the woman he loves has done her hus-

Per

CAR

Katherine Balfour

fascinating style.

No one need be deterred from reading Mr Dering's new novel, *Dr Mirabel's Theory* (2), by learning from the title-page that it is a psychological study. It is fully as interesting as most tales of love and marriage. Nor is it without the element of love, though the author has the audacity to wind it up without either marriage or promise of marriage. To make up for that great lack, there is a ghost, which may or may not have been a hallucination, and there is a hypnotic murder, and a beautiful murderess for heroine, whom the two heroes of the story would have liked to marry had she not committed murder and suicide, either of which, and especially the latter, was enough to block the way. The story is more about hypnotism than about the theory of poor Dr Mirabel, though that plays a vital part in the drama. The doctor was no Christian, but he was a firm believer, on scientific grounds, in a future, or rather a continued, life after the death of the body. His theory was derived from a hypothesis of Professor Clifford, of all men, who surely little dreamt that by his hypothetical "mind-stuff" he was laying the foundation for the scientific proof of human, or perhaps we should say, animal immortality. That Dr Mirabel's theory—which he shall be left to expound—was right is a presumption from the fact that he came back to his house and his wife after he was dead and buried. More of the story we shall not tell, but it goes in the direction of belief in hypnotism as a therapeutic agent. It must be added further

Scotsman
Oct. 2. 1893 3

that it is remarkably well written, and has much excellent delineation of character, and its lighter parts are amusing, and sparkle with genuine humour not without strong touches of satire.

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

"THE UNDERGRADUATE."

An extremely clever novel, and equally sparkling . . . as full of knowledge and nearly as good as anything Mrs. Oliphant described in the 'Chronicles of Carlingford.' . . . The conversations are extremely amusing.—*Times.*

The smartness, sharpness, and seeming audacity of this satirical novel render it sufficiently amusing. It is a broad caricature of two very opposite classes—namely, the quibbling and squabbling members of a Dissenting congregation in a seaside town, and the academical young ladies, damsels, and matrons, accused of flirting and other vanities, at St. Mary's University, to the detriment of male students. — *Illustrated London News.*

A very solid "sketch;" it contains lessons of all kinds; all of them are pompous, most of them lengthy, and just a few are learned. The motive of the book is good.—*Saturday Review.*

Ross George Dering, in 'The Undergraduate,' has produced a series of admirable sketches of Oxford as she really is, and not as she used to be. They are delightfully fresh and amusing—more so than anything that has appeared for a long time.—*Graphic.*

Dr. Mirabel's Theory

A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY

BY

Ross George Dering

Author of 'Giraldi'

'The Undergraduate' etc.

ERRATA.

Vol. I., page 91, *for* "that," *read* "than."

Vol. I., page 222, *for* "Balls Bond," *read* "Ball's Pond."

Vol. III., page 29, *for* "deification," *read* "reification."

London

Richard Bentley & Son

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen

1893

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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and not as she used to be. They are delightfully fresh and amusing—more so than anything that has appeared for a long time.—*Graphic.*

Dr. Mirabel's Theory

BY

Ross George Dering

Author of 'Giraldi'

'The Undergraduate' etc.

A PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY

"Mind and matter," said the lady in the wig, "glide swift into the vortex of Immensity."—DICKENS.

In Three Volumes

Vol. I.

London

Richard Bentley & Son

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen

1893

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PREFATORY NOTE.

In view of the fact that I was once accused by a Religious Newspaper of having stolen a plot from an obscure novel the very name of which was entirely unknown to me; and of the further fact that the Christmas (1891) issue of an esteemed London Periodical did contain one or two names and phrases which will be found in this book of mine: I now wish to state that the first half of the present work, in which these expressions occur, was written by me during the Summer and Autumn of the said year 1891, in the City of Tokyo, Japan.

R. G. D.

Azabu,
December, 1892.

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DR. MIRABEL'S THEORY.

CHAPTER I.

PARENTS AND SON.

"MY *dearest* Marmaduke!" cried Mrs. Palliser, throwing up both her hands. "I can scarcely believe my ears!"

"Thou—sands of pounds a year," repeated Mr. Palliser, in a portentously impressive voice. "There can be no doubt whatever about the figures. A man in the City told me to-day that Rothschild says there's an enormous fortune in it. It's the biggest thing of modern times. It has only got to be floated to revolutionise the

commerce and the social conditions of the whole civilised world. People in general don't know much about it yet, and that's why I've been able to get this promise of an agency for Gerard; but when they do—my word! There'll be such a rush for the shares as we haven't seen since the reign of George the First."

"I never heard of such a thing since I was born!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, in an emphatic staccato. "*What* did you say it was called, Marmaduke?"

"The Universal Warranted Non-Intoxicating Alcoholic Liquor Association," replied Mr. Palliser, *ore rotundo*. "It is based on the most extraordinary discovery ever made in chemistry, by means of which all wines, and spirits, and malt liquors are rendered absolutely powerless to make any man drunk, however much he swallows, without affecting the flavour in the very slightest degree. Everybody will use it, of course. I shouldn't wonder if a Bill were brought into Par-

liament, rendering the use of it compulsory. Just think of that—think of that—think what that would amount to in a year. How many public houses are there in England? How many gallons of beer are brewed? How many dozens of wine are imported annually from the Continent? Well, now, it costs exactly three-halfpence, or a fraction under, per gallon, to introduce the anti-intoxicant into the liquor. That is the average. Spirits require more than wine, and wine more than beer. But that's the average. What amount, then, will be required every year to counteract the intoxicating principle in the millions of quarts consumed all over the country? An amount representing a gi-gantic sum of money. The calculation's as simple as A B C—a simple multiplication sum. And the legislature, of course, will take it up. Every brewer, every wine-merchant, will be forced, under heavy penalties, to introduce the ingredient into every quart of liquor he sells, and the returns to

all the original shareholders in the Association will be something fabulous."

"What a *wonderful* thing, Marmaduke!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, quite overcome by the brilliancy of this picture.

"Ah," said Mr. Palliser, shaking his head. "And it 'll revolutionise society. Drunkenness will be impossible. A man won't be able to intoxicate himself if he wants to. We live in marvellous times. My word! What would my father have said if he could have heard of such a discovery as this?"

Mr. Palliser was a handsome, grey-headed, elderly gentleman, of commanding presence, and a habit of mouthing his words which imparted much impressiveness to what he said. His wife resembled him in being also handsome, grey-headed, and elderly; but she was still slim in figure, which could scarcely be said of her husband, and withal of an excitable nature, that showed itself in sudden changes of mood—from gaiety to

depression, from the most sanguine confidence to the depths of a serene despair. She was a very religious woman, yet she never looked more hopelessly miserable than when she was reading the Bible ; and though she would weep copiously at a sermon, it required but a very modest quip to set her risual muscles at work again as soon as she found herself enjoying her Sunday dinner.

"What's that you're saying about your father, my dear ?" said a very old lady who had not spoken before. Her age was something over eighty, and she was rather deaf ; but her eyes were wonderfully good and strong, and she now peered enquiringly over her spectacles in a way that seemed rather to irritate Mr. Palliser.

"Nothing of any consequence, mother," replied that gentleman, with a certain raising of the voice. "We were speaking about a wonderful discovery that has lately been made by a German chemist—a discovery by which it is possible to render alcoholic

liquors non-intoxicating, without altering their flavour."

"And it's been made into a company, you know," added Mrs. Palliser, bending towards the old lady so that she might hear the better. "And when once it is started everybody will be obliged to use it by Act of Parliament, and then there will never be any more drunken people in the whole world."

"Well, that is good news," commented the old lady, as she resumed her knitting. "I suppose that will be the beginning of the millennium. I am sure we have been waiting for it long enough."

"And it will be a wonderful opening for Gerard," continued Mr. Palliser, addressing his wife again. "Of course the operations of the company will extend all over Europe, and agencies will be established in every town. Well, Jerningham, who is the leading man in the whole concern, and has the very greatest influence with the Board of Directors, has promised me that Gerard shall

have the agency at Stockholm, with a commission on all business that passes through his hands. There's probably not a country in all Europe where there's so much drunkenness as there is in Sweden, and the returns to the agent at Stockholm, at the very lowest computation, will amount to thousands of pounds a year."

"We certainly do live in extraordinary times," sighed Mrs. Palliser, leaning back in her chair. "Your mother may well think the millennium's coming, Marmaduke. But, my dear—is there no special *knowledge* required for a position of this sort? Because, you know, Gerard is not much over twenty-one, and"—

"No knowledge at all," replied Mr. Palliser. "Except, of course, the simplest counting-house routine. The agency will be extensive enough to require a large staff of clerks, and all Gerard will have to do will be to exercise a general supervision, and issue the necessary orders, and—er—pocket

his commissions. It's the finest chance a young man ever had. He ought to be able to retire with an immense fortune by the time he's thirty years of age."

"I hope you'll be careful and mind what you are about, my dear," said the old lady in the corner. "I never like companies myself, and never risked a penny in one in my life. Much better get Gerard a good clerkship in the City at ninety pounds a year. That's how your father began life, my dear, and I don't suppose you'd say that you are a better business man than he was in his day."

"You don't quite understand the affair, mother," returned Mr. Palliser, somewhat overbearingly. "This isn't like an ordinary company. When you know more about it"—

"Oh yes, my dear, I know all about it," said the old lady, placidly. "I understand companies very well; that's why I have never invested in one. I always say these

little companies are like Jonah's gourd; they spring up one day"—

"But it *isn't* a little company, mother!" almost bellowed Mr. Palliser in his exasperation; "it's an enormous syndicate—a syndicate consisting of some of the very wealthiest men in the wealthiest City in the world!"

"My dear, I know quite as much about these little City companies as *you* do," replied the old lady, with much complacence; "and all I say is, don't risk your money in any one of them, because, you know, my dear, you are not able to afford it."

Mr. Palliser breathed fiercely through his nostrils, closed his mouth hard, and glared round the room in silent fury. The old lady resumed her knitting in cheerful unconsciousness of having said anything to irritate, while Mrs. Palliser assumed a woe-begone expression, as though the crosses and perplexities of life had suddenly reached a pitch too great for humanity to

support. The domestic barometer, which only a few moments previously had pointed to Set Fair, was now falling in the direction of Stormy.

It was during these depressing moments that a very welcome diversion occurred. A slow, gentle step was heard outside, and Gerard Palliser quietly entered the room. Slightly over the average height, broad-shouldered and thin in the flank, with a pale complexion, deep blue eyes, and thick dark-brown hair parted in the middle and falling carelessly over his forehead, there could be no doubt that he was an unusually handsome youth. His mother, of course, idolised him; his father was proud of him, too, and determined that he should make a figure in the world—for he was a rather ambitious man—without undergoing the sordid drudgery which falls to the lot of so many. It was his wish that Gerard should burst into full flower at once; the process of putting forth preliminary leaves, and labouring under the

disadvantage of the slowly-budding stage, being vicariously intolerable to the mind of this sanguine gentleman. Gerard, on his side, had his ambitions too; but he seldom spoke of them, and there probably was never a human being more curiously at cross-purposes with those who wished him well than was this strangely constituted youth *quoad* the excellent couple who had the happiness to call him son.

"My dearest Gerard, you've come just in the nick of time," exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, all dejection vanishing as if by magic from her countenance. "We were that very moment speaking of you. What do you think? Your father has managed to get a most splendid appointment for you in Sweden. You're going to Stockholm. You'll have an income of some thousands a year from the very first. You're to be agent of the Anti-Intoxication—*what* is the name of the company, did you say, Marmaduke?"

"The Universal Warranted Non-Intoxi-

cating Alcoholic Liquor Association," repeated Mr. Palliser with recovered spirits.

"Exactly," returned Mrs. Palliser. "The operations of the company will be enormous, and the returns simply fabulous, your father says. And you are to be agent in Stockholm, with a commission upon all the business that passes through your hands. It seems to me that your fortune's as good as made."

"Well, what do you think of it, my boy?" asked Mr. Palliser, turning with a triumphant air to Gerard.

"It all sounds very queer," said Gerard, after a pause. "When was this company floated?"

"H'm—well, I don't think it is exactly floated yet," replied Mr. Palliser. "But there'll be a most influential Directorate, and of course they'll know the best time for putting the scheme forward. Very few shares, however, will be offered to the public, I fancy. I think myself uncommonly

lucky to have got five hundred pounds' worth privately—as a sort of favour, you know. We needn't trouble ourselves about its being floated."

"And what is the object of it?" enquired Gerard, with as little interest in his voice as though the scheme had no bearing whatever upon his own fortunes.

"My dear, I've already told you," answered Mrs. Palliser, with a touch of impatience in her voice. "It's a wonderful discovery that has been made of some substance, or chemical combination, by means of which all intoxicating properties in spirituous liquors are at once destroyed. Now if you only take the number of gallons of beer that are brewed in England every year, and multiply them by three-pence halfpenny —that's right, Marmaduke, isn't it?—and then find out the number of public-houses there are in London"—

"Never mind doing all those sums, mother," interposed Gerard, in his low, lazy

voice. "It's a German discovery, isn't it?"

"A discovery by one of the first chemists of modern times," said Mr. Palliser, pompously.

"I suppose you mean Hoffmeyer," continued Gerard. "But he certainly isn't one of the first chemists of modern times. I think he is considered rather a quack than otherwise. I know, now, what you mean. He did announce, about a year and a half ago, that he had made some such discovery as you refer to. I remember reading all about it in *Knowledge*. But it was tested, and proved a failure."

"A *failure?*" almost shrieked Mrs. Palliser. "What do you mean, my dear?"

"Well, it was a failure in two ways," replied Gerard, comfortably. "In the first place the process of manufacture was so expensive as to render the whole thing impossible for common use, and secondly it turned the wine quite sour within a fortnight

of its introduction. I am surprised to hear that they're trying to bring it forward in London. Its collapse in Germany was complete."

"Most extraordinary thing I ever heard in my life!" ejaculated Mr. Palliser, with an indignant glare.

"My dear Gerard, there *must* be a mistake somewhere," exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, excitedly. "It's impossible that all these great financiers and people in London can be taking up a scheme that has been proved a failure. It can't be the same thing; or perhaps it has been improved since, you know. It's not likely that your father has been so misled."

"Jerningham told me himself"—began Mr. Palliser in his most ponderous tones.

"Is that the man who edits the *Financial Trumpeter?*" asked Gerard, yawning.

"That's the man," said Mr. Palliser, promptly. "One of the very highest authorities on"—

"I know the name," resumed Gerard. "He was defendant in that bribery case, you know, a few months ago. They proved that he had made fifty thousand pounds by floating companies that all went into liquidation within six months. I don't think I'd go much by what he says if I were you."

Poor Mrs. Palliser gazed distractedly from one to the other, completely at a loss for words. Her husband, unable to meet Gerard's statements, yet wholly unconvinced by them, fumed, puffed, and fretted silently; while Gerard, stepping to the open window, calmly filled his pipe and leant out to smoke. It was a fair, sweet evening, late in May; the sun was sinking fast, and a cool, heather-scented breeze came sweeping over Grayshott Common, tumbling the lad's hair and playing havoc with the blue wreaths of his pipe as they curled upward.

"I'm sure I don't know *what* we shall do, Marmaduke, if this is true," said Mrs. Palliser at last. "It'll be a most awful dis-

appointment. Do you think that Jerningham *is* such a rascal as Gerard says?"

"He has got five hundred pounds of mine in hard money, any how," replied Mr. Palliser, who now began to feel somewhat uncomfortable. "I shall go up to town and see him the first thing to-morrow morning; and if I find that he *has* been jewing me—my word, he may look out for squalls."

"Don't take your cheque-book, my dear; don't take your cheque-book, whatever you do," said the old lady in the corner. "Give it to your wife to lock up, or that man will get another five hundred out of you as sure as your name's Marmaduke."

"All right, mother; that'll do, that'll do," snapped Mr. Palliser, in not unnatural irritation.

"It's a dreadful trial to one's faith," moaned Mrs. Palliser, looking the very picture of despair. "What wretches there are in the world!" she added, with energy. "It's a most mysterious dispensation that

such people are allowed to flourish, and that's all that one can say."

"There'd be no knaves if there were no fools, my dear," said old Mrs. Palliser, cheerfully. "One ought to be careful not to put all the blame on Providence, I sometimes think."

"My dear Mrs. Palliser!" exclaimed the younger lady of that name, horrified at the charge, "I never question the decrees of Providence; I look upon such a thing as most impious presumption. But no one can deny that they are sometimes very mysterious; and then it is that we must just have faith, you know."

"Well, my dear, I don't think we have any of us much reason to complain," replied the old lady, knitting industriously. "I'm sure I never thought that Gerard would have pulled through that illness of his last winter; and yet, you see, there he is, as well as ever he was in his life. Believe me, my dear, we get just as much good as we deserve, and perhaps a little over into the bargain."

"Ah, dear, naughty boy!" said his mother, shaking her head. "I only wish I could get him to see it in the same light."

"What, mother?" asked Gerard, hearing his name mentioned.

"Your grandmother was saying how thankful you ought to be to Providence for your recovery last January," answered Mrs. Palliser, "when even the doctor had almost given you up. But you know, my dear, you have such strange notions about these things —and you know what a trouble it is to me, Gerard. Don't you feel yourself, now, that a very signal mercy was vouchsafed to us when you took that favourable turn?"

"Vouchsafed by whom?" returned Gerard, slowly puffing out a thin, long stream of smoke.

"My dear," said Mrs. Palliser, decidedly, "there is only One in whose hands are the issues of life and death."

"You mean that God interfered at the last moment to save my life," said Gerard.

"The radical change of treatment, and the advice of that London doctor who was called in, had nothing to do with it. I see. Well, if it was God who saved my life, who was it that attacked it? Who made me ill to begin with?"

"My dear Gerard," replied his mother, "we know that all things which happen to us come from the same wise and merciful Providence; and that when He sees fit to lay suffering upon us, and then in His own good time to relieve us of it, it is our duty to acknowledge His mercy and His wisdom, and not to talk in the shocking way about it that you do."

"If a man in the street knocks me down and then picks me up again, I scarcely see why I should *thank* him for it," said Gerard, innocently.

"Gerard!" cried Mrs. Palliser, aghast. "How can you presume to speak like that? It turns my blood quite cold to hear you. Have you no respect for the mysteries of

Providence? Can we expect to understand everything that is permitted to befall us?"

"The mysteries of Providence," murmured Gerard, as he thoughtfully pressed down the tobacco in his pipe, "are, to the religious world, what the glacial epoch is to perplexed geologists. The phrase is a convenient one; it explains everything—and nothing." *

Then he took up a small book, which he carefully put in his pocket, and very slowly left the room, remarking that he thought he would stroll as far as Gibbet Hill. His mother knew and detested that same small book. It was a volume of Matthew Arnold's Poems, and to the influence of that author upon her son's mind she attributed everything in his views of life which so distressed and shocked her susceptibilities as a religious woman.

* "Whatever you are *totally* ignorant of, assert to be the explanation of everything else." See James's *Psychology*, vol. i. p. 347.

CHAPTER II.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

THE worthy people to whom our readers have been introduced in the foregoing chapter stand in no need of any particular description. What they appeared, even to strangers, after a very few moments' conversation, was what they actually were. It required no aid from experience, or insight, or even knowledge of physiognomy, to form a correct estimate of their characters. Simple-minded, sanguine, confiding, and incurably imprudent, Mr. Palliser was an object of perpetual anxiety to his friends; while his wife, unluckily, had just as much confidence in his supposed shrewdness, judgment, and

knowledge of the world as he himself, poor man, had in the honesty of—say Mr. Jerningham. He was a country gentleman of moderate fortune, and amiable disposition in the main; but his amiability was somewhat infected by a certain arrogance of speech and manner, while his fortune had suffered, more or less, from his persistent belief in the honesty of the various Jerninghams who occasionally crossed his path.

It was, indeed, difficult to understand how such a couple could be the parents of a boy like Gerard. He was in all respects their opposite. Where they were sanguine, he was critical; where they were enthusiastic, he was cold; where they were credulous, hasty, eager to regard as certain whatever they happened to desire, he played the sceptic and the devil's advocate. We have just seen with what complete *sang froid* he toppled over the imposing castle in the air which was the latest of his father's feats in this branch of architecture; and this incident

was characteristic of them both. But underlying this mental peculiarity, repellent in one so young, there lurked other traits which did more than redeem his character from the charge of churlishness or want of sympathy.

Watch him now, as he strides slowly through the heather with the soft cool breeze blowing in his face, and his hands carelessly thrust into the side-pockets of his loose jacket. Not a shade of annoyance or disappointment can be traced upon his features; the thought of his father's glowing promises has crossed his mind, it is true, but only to be dismissed with a passing smile, born of a certain half-affectionate, half-compassionate disdain. "Poor dear old Sir Gullible!" he murmured to himself, and forthwith dismissed the subject. If his fortune were to be made, it would scarcely be by such a very royal road as that. And Gerard was not ambitious of a fortune constructed of commissions on the sale of beer, non-intoxicating or the reverse. Whatever fortune might

come to him should be moulded in a higher sphere of action altogether. It was not entirely clear to him that life, of itself, was worth much after all; but if it had to be lived, then let him at any rate do something to solve its deeper problems, to place the rule of right upon an impregnable foundation, to sweep away the cobwebs that for so long had obscured the moral vision of mankind, and eventually to leave the world a wiser and a happier place for his having lived in it. We have most of us cherished far less noble dreams than his; and ideals, be they high or low, form more than the half of life.

In a short time he reached the top of Gibbet Hill, and stood for a moment gazing at the wonderful stretch of undulating, richly-wooded country which lay spread out beneath him. Then he turned round, and walked up to the stone obelisk which commemorates the punishment suffered on that spot by the murderers of the unwary sailor. The story was of course familiar to him, and for

the hundredth time he read the beautiful though strangely inappropriate inscriptions on the column, musingly :

Post Tenebras Lux.
In Luce Spes.
Post Obitum Salus.
In Obitu Pax.

"Ah!" said Gerard, softly. "I wonder." He threw himself upon the grass, drew the little volume from his pocket, and turned over its pages with the gesture of one by whom they were well known and greatly loved. "Who can be sure of anything?" he thought ; and then he read, in a low voice, the passage which first turned up.

"Hath man no second life? *Pitch this one high!*
Sits there no Judge in Heaven, our sin to see?
More strictly, then, the inward judge obey!
Was Christ a man like us? *Ah! let us try*
If we then, too, can be such men as he!"

"It's very curious," soliloquised Gerard. "Somehow I never open Matthew Arnold without finding a passage bearing upon my own thoughts at the time. What better

answer could any one have given me now? He was the wisest of men. We none of us know anything, but he knew that he didn't know, and his teaching is the wisest and the safest of all."

He was lying near the verge of the hill, just where it sinks abruptly and precipitously to the plain beneath; and as he raised his eyes to the far horizon his field of vision was suddenly invaded by a discordant object, something that at first sight looked like a barndoor fowl, moving along the grassy edge in front of him. The next moment he saw that it was a woman's hat, weighted somewhat profusely with feathers; and as the path below took an upward curve, the head supporting it came into view. It was that of a young woman—a lady—of seven or eight and twenty years of age, fashionably dressed in a trim tailor-made costume, and, in spite of her fluttering hat, undeniably good-looking. She had fine, firmly-cut features, bright, clear eyes, and a remarkably

decided mouth; she walked with a strong, resolute step, and a gait more distinguished, perhaps, for freedom than for grace. It was impossible to ignore the fact that she was a handsome person in her way; but equally impossible not to experience a certain sense of disappointment in regarding her—a sense that there was something lacking, without which it would be difficult to call her beautiful. She was too bright, too striking, too hard.

Gerard, who recognised her, closed his book, rose to his feet, and lifted his hat slightly. The next moment she had turned the crest of the hill and stood in front of him.

"You look quite surprised to see me, Mr. Palliser," she said in a clear, penetrating voice, as they shook hands.

"I suppose I was scarcely expecting to see anybody here just now," returned Gerard. "You seemed to be coming out of the ground. Have you been a long walk?"

"Pretty well," replied the lady. "I think

it would do you good if you were to walk more than you do, instead of lying about the place in a perpetual dream. What's that book you have with you?"

"Do you know it?" said Gerard, smiling, as he showed it her.

"Yes, I know it," replied Madame Mirabel; for the lady was a married lady. "I suppose you admire Matthew Arnold. He's well enough—for a certain stage of development."

"What stage do you mean?" asked Gerard, put on his mettle at once.

"A rather immature stage," said Madame Mirabel, with a slight laugh. "Don't be angry; we most of us pass through it. Do you like him very much?"

"I more than like him," answered Gerard. "I think he is the wisest man I have ever read. And his style is as perfect as his thoughts."

"I don't criticise his style," replied Madame Mirabel; "but surely it is too much to say

that his thoughts are perfect. No man can think perfectly who does not think exactly; and an exact thinker Arnold certainly was not. I should call him a sentimentalist. True, he had escaped from the network of superstition in which he was brought up, but there he remained, his intellect forbidding him to go back, his transcendentalism preventing him from accepting the logical results of his convictions. In short, you might almost call him a religionist. His position was entirely untenable."

"Arnold a religionist!" exclaimed Gerard, deprecatingly.

"Give me the book," said Madame Mirabel. "Ah, it's almost too dark to see. Look at this line, now. What does he mean by talking about our souls being soothed and encouraged by the 'Eternal Father's smile' after we are dead? Or here, again:

'Children of men! the Unseen Power, whose eye
Forever doth accompany mankind,
Hath looked on no religion scornfully
That men did ever find.

Which has not taught weak wills how much they can?
Which has not fall'n on the dry heart like rain?
Which has not cried to sunk, self-weary man—
Thou must be born again!'

And you call that man an exact thinker. I call him a poet, a supernaturalist; almost—though I don't want to hurt your feelings—almost a theologian. And theology is not a subject which interests me."

"I don't think it's fair to taunt Arnold with being a theologian because he uses Christian metaphors and terminology," remarked Gerard, feeling rather sore. "I read him differently, and he never grates upon me in that way. He could never be the help he is to me if he did."

"Much better read Clifford, and Haeckel, and Maudsley," said Madame Mirabel, as they turned to walk back together. "There you are in the region of solid fact. I was reading an article by some French doctor this morning on microbes, and that is one reason why I have come out to get my lungs

full of oxygen now. Nothing like ozone when you have been in a sick room all day."

"Ah! I forgot," said Gerard, simply. "I am so sorry. Is Dr. Mirabel no better?"

"He never will be any better, Mr. Palliser," said the wife, with a sudden catching of her breath. "He is—I am afraid it is consumption," she added, in a lower tone. "The most that I or anybody can do is to lessen his sufferings as much as possible. The disease has gone too far to be arrested now."

"I am greatly shocked to hear it," replied Gerard, awestruck in spite of himself. "To be in possession of all one's senses, and yet to be looking forward to certain death within a measurable time—one can scarcely realize it. And I need scarcely say how deeply I feel for you."

"It's harder for me than for him," said Madame Mirabel, calmly. "My husband is perfectly cheerful, and is making all sorts of plans for his new stage of existence, as

he calls it—poor Gaston! You know he has strange theories about the continuity of experience," said Madame Mirabel, compassionately, "and contends they are deducible from science. And he has had so much pain all his life that it would be wanton cruelty to prove to him what chimeras all such notions are. Why deny him his few more months of happiness? He will never know that it is all a delusion. Yes, he is happy enough in spite of his sufferings; whereas I—well, as you know, I don't believe in it, of course, and it is rather an overwhelming thought that we shall soon be separated—and for ever."

Gerard thought that, under the circumstances, she certainly was the more to be pitied, and could not sufficiently admire the heroic calmness with which she confronted her fate. But he pitied her dying husband, too; and, not being by any means so dogmatic as the uncompromising young woman beside him, caught himself thinking of Dr.

Mirabel's 'delusion' more leniently than he might have done at any other time. That she was almost unnaturally cold and hard only occurred to him for a moment; the next, he saw in her demeanour nothing but the finest self-repression, the most consistent carrying out, under severe tests, of her scientific creed; and he pitied her all the more that her creed was such a harsh one. But then—if it were true?

"I would sooner share your husband's belief than yours, Madame Mirabel," he said at last.

"No doubt," replied the prospective widow, readily. "We are all selfish, and the desire for immortality is selfishness pure and simple. People do not understand this; if they did, they would be much happier than they actually are. It is religious delusion, fostered by religious selfishness, which lies at the root of most human discontent, and the world will never be really happy and restful until it finds this out. Theology

is right so far—there *is* a peace which passeth understanding; but no theology will ever give it you. I myself, for instance, never knew what peace was until I had got rid of every vestige of desire to become a Christian. No really, scientifically moral man can desire a future life. Even individual existence entails a certain subtle selfishness of its own, here and now. But you were contrasting my husband's belief on the subject and my own. What is yours?"

"I have none," said Gerard, simply. "I merely don't know."

"There is a sort of agnosticism," remarked Madame Mirabel, pointedly, "a feeble, flaccid thing, which has in it, to use Tyndall's words, the 'promise and potency' of theological religion itself. Some even of our foremost thinkers are tainted with it. It is observable in Tyndall himself,—in Herbert Spencer even,—while it is actually rampant in John Stuart Mill. Read his

Posthumous Essays. How that man's mind must have degenerated in his later life! And I recognise the very same instability in you, Mr. Palliser. No man with a truly scientific mind would find comfort and teaching in such a writer as Matthew Arnold. Put him away, Mr. Palliser, and if you must read poetry, read Gerard Massey. His sun-myth theory of the origin of the Christian legend is interesting, though not scientifically proved."

Gerard made no answer.

"You have not been to see us for some time," resumed Madame Mirabel, after a pause. "Won't you come in now? My husband would be so glad to see you."

"Certainly I will," said Gerard, rather surprised. "Of course you understand that I had no idea he was so ill. Are you sure he will be able to see me?"

"Quite sure," replied Madame Mirabel, with a sudden smile. "I believe it will do him good."

"Then of course I'll come," said Gerard; and fell into a fit of musing.

They walked on for the next ten minutes without resuming the topic of their conversation, and soon afterwards arrived at Gorse Cottage. It may be as well to state here that the Mirabels were comparatively new residents in the neighbourhood. The doctor, a bright, clever young Frenchman of some five and thirty years of age, had formerly been medical officer at one of the Legations in the East, where he had met, and married, the English girl who was now his wife. Her beauty had attracted, as her originality had dazzled, him; and when the state of his health necessitated his retirement from the service, they both accepted the advice of an eminent physician to try a bracing climate. Unfortunately, however, the disease had been either neglected too long, or was of too virulent a nature, to yield to ordinary treatment; and the consequence was that, after the poor young doctor had been at Hind-

head for six months, it was generally recognised that the chances of his restoration to health were exceedingly remote.

"Gaston, I have brought Mr. Gerard Palliser in to see you," said Madame Mirabel, as they entered.

There was no mistaking his complaint. He had the bright, restless, hollow eyes and thin, hectic cheeks of a man far gone in consumption, and as he turned uneasily in his armchair at the sound of his wife's voice a fit of coughing seized him which prevented his replying for some seconds. Gerard waited quietly till it was over, and then, advancing to his side, said—

"I am so sorry to hear you have been suffering so much of late. I would have come to see you earlier had I known of it."

"Ah, my dear Monsieur Gerard!" exclaimed the sick man, breaking out into a smile that irradiated his whole face. "Yes, you are very good to come. I am sick—ah, yes, sick unto death. But we will not talk

of that. What for should we speak about it? It is kismet—*voilà tout.* And the subject is not an agreeable one. You have been walking with my wife?"

"I met Madame Mirabel at Gibbet Hill, and she brought me in," said Gerard, taking a seat beside him.

"That was very good of her," replied Dr. Mirabel, in his hollow tones. "I think I should like to be buried on Gibbet Hill; it is a fine airy place. Bah! I again forget. We will not anticipate. And you, my dear Monsieur Gerard; how goes it with you? How 'wags the world,' as you English say?"

"Thanks—much as usual," said Gerard, feeling a reluctance to talk about himself in the presence of a man so circumstanced.

"Ah, yes—it is fine to be young and strong," gasped the sufferer. "And what's the news outside?"

Gerard mentioned one or two trifles of local interest which he thought might amuse

him. He was right; the doctor broke into the gayest laughter, cut short the moment afterwards by a strangling cough.

"Ah, bah!" he whispered, throwing himself back when the fit had passed, "there are times, you see, when even to laugh is an expensive luxury. But what worth is life without laughing? Your Thomas More died laughing; a noble death, monsieur Gerard. *Hein?* Then there was Heine. Ah, Heine. He was no German. He was a Frenchman to the core of his heart. You have read Heine? The more he suffered the more he laughed. People say he was half Jew, half Greek. Well, then, that is how a true Frenchman is composed. You have read him—*hein?*"

"Yes, I have read him," answered Gerard. "You know what has been said of him by an English critic?"

"English critic of Heine?" exclaimed Dr. Mirabel, his eyes sparkling with amusement. "No! I have never seen. I cannot

imagine your English people reading Heine —I mean reading the man himself, not his writings. They could not understand even the alphabet of him. Well, tell me; what does the English critic say?"

"I have it here," said Gerard, taking his *vade mecum* out of his pocket. "It occurs in a poem on Heine's grave.

> 'The Spirit of the world,
> Beholding the absurdity of men—
> Their vaunts, their feats—let a sardonic smile
> For one short moment wander o'er his lips:
> *That smile was Heine.*'"

"But that is superb—superb!" exclaimed Dr. Mirabel in his astonishment. "I beg your pardon, my dear Monsieur Gerard; I beg everybody's pardon. But the man who wrote that was no Englishman; no, he was a Greek. What was his name? Ah, I have much to learn, and there is no time to lose. Please let me see that book."

Gerard, flushing with pleasure, handed him the volume, which the sick man scanned eagerly.

"It is great favourite of mine," he said, as he watched the other's interest. "I always find what I want in it—something bearing upon the subject I happen to be thinking of at any moment. Let me leave it with you. I'm sure you'll enjoy reading it."

"I accept, I accept," said the Frenchman, gaily. "Oh yes, I shall like it very much. When you are going a long journey, *mon cher*, the chief thing is to take everything you are likely to want on the way. If you arrive at your destination empty-handed, you will find yourself in a fix, and you will think, Ah, the fool I was; why did I not pack my portmanteau properly before I started?"

Gerard looked a little puzzled.

"You don't understand, *hein?*" pursued Dr. Mirabel, sinking his voice with a view to economising his strength. "But it is very simple. We must all go a long journey some day. Well, what do you do before you go on a journey: pack up, don't you?

Voyons donc: life is the time to pack; and this process of packing is what we call study, education, learning all that can be known about the minds of others and the universe around us. For instance: in your life-time you study the construction of the heavens, the history of the earth, the evolution of species, the progress of humanity—or what else you please. At last you die; the separation takes place; you are—what I call—set free. Then come the grand opportunities. Then you are admitted to the other side of the curtain. Then you may discover the secrets of the nature. You may watch worlds in the course of development, in the course of decay. You may follow the rush of a system or a galaxy through space. You may assist at the parturition of a sun, and be spectator of the intellectual evolutions of some humans in another planet. Ah, what a prospect! But how, if you are ignorant when the time comes? How, if you have never studied

astronomy, or mathematics, or physiology, or psychology, or politics? Shall you not be at a disadvantage? But of course; you are like a traveller who has come unprovided with what is necessary for him on his journey, and no knowledge of the language of the new country."

"And you are really looking forward to all that?" asked Gerard, with a wrinkle of perplexity upon his brow.

"*Mais oui!*" replied the young doctor. "I cannot give you all the explications now; but another day, another day, you know. You see, my wife believe not these things. She is *matérialiste;* she say, After death—nothing. But I am also *matérialiste;* and I tell her, Julie, you understand not the facts you deal with. You draw wrong conclusions from premisses I do not dispute. Yet she will have her way. *Dieu,* they are all like that. They are all charming, but they will have their ways."

Gerard smiled. "Your theory is a very

attractive one," he said cautiously. "It would be a great thing if its truth could be really proved."

"It can be proved," replied Dr. Mirabel; "I can prove it to you. But not to-day. And there is more—oh, much more. Ah! there is my wife. Julie, you did well to bring Monsieur Gerard to see me. He has done me—how do you say?—no end of goodness. He has an open mind. Here is a little book he lend me which I shall prefer even to"—

"Gaston, you must not excite yourself," interposed his wife in her clear tones. "I fear you've been talking too much. You must rest now. I'm going to bring you some boiled custard, and then it will be time for you to go to bed."

"Ah, *cruelle!*" said her husband, playfully. "Well, if it must be so it must. She always treat me like that, Monsieur Gerard; she is a tyrant, a despot. You are going? So soon?"

"I must, indeed," said Gerard, rising. "My people will be wondering where I am."

"I think he had better leave you now," said Madame Mirabel, "or you will be too much excited to sleep."

"Well then, *au revoir*," assented the patient, clasping Gerard's strong young hand in his thin, nervous fingers. "You have made me great pleasure this evening, *mon ami*, and I am very thankful to you. When will you come again?"

"He shall come again as soon as ever you feel strong enough to see him," replied Madame Mirabel. "You will, won't you?" she added, as Gerard took his leave.

"You may rely upon it," he said; and left the room with her.

She stopped him for a moment in the hall. "You see how he is," she said, in a subdued voice. "You have cheered him wonderfully; but of course all excitement is bad for him. You will come again, won't

you? The strain upon me is very great—greater than you might imagine. A quiet visit from you every now and then would be a relief to *both* of us. You won't forget?"

"Indeed I won't," Gerard assured her. Then, instead of letting him out, she hesitated.

"I wanted to ask you something," she said, with slightly less self-possession than usual. "Did I strike you as being rather hard this evening—I mean, when we were out?"

"A—a little, I think," replied Gerard; and then he coloured vividly under her gaze. "But only at first. The next moment I was admiring your fortitude. I think it is—almost—sublime."

"Thank you," said Madame Mirabel. "I like people to be honest. And I'm *not* hard—in reality. That is all."

The one touch—the touch of something like softness, womanliness, feeling—which had up till then been wanting to make her

really beautiful, lit up her eyes as she spoke. She seemed a different being. Then she opened the door, and he went out into the starlight.

CHAPTER III.

MADEMOISELLE LA FUTURE.

MR. PALLISER, when in an equable frame of mind, had a certain airy, open, gracious, and withal country-gentleman sort of manner which went far to make him a very agreeable man to meet. He rather prided himself upon his easy flow of conversation, and his familiarity with what he called "the topics of the day"; and if his views upon such matters were not particularly deep, they were always well and pleasantly expressed. He was a good talker, and, being naturally disposed to the embellishment, if not exaggeration, of the incidents he recounted, an interesting one; so variegated,

indeed, was his repertory, that he was seldom known to relate an anecdote the same way twice; from which it may be inferred that he had a very exuberant imagination, richly cultivated. It must be confessed, however, that when he arrived at home again, the evening after that on which our story opens, from his expedition to the City, he wore a taciturn and somewhat crestfallen expression, as of a man whose calculations have somehow turned out wrong.

He found three ladies waiting dinner for him in the drawing-room, with two of whom we are already acquainted. The third was a certain Miss Rose Chattering, the daughter of a neighbouring gentleman of that name, and the object of no small affection on the part of Mrs. Palliser the younger. Nor was it surprising that such should have been the case, for dear Rosie was one of the most perfectly charming young ladies in Hampshire. She could play 'The Trout,' and

'The Carnaval de Venise,' and Heller's 'Promenades d'un Solitaire' very prettily upon the piano; she went to church every Sunday in a decorous church-going bonnet, and whispered the responses out of a beautiful gilt-edged prayer-book; she thought that croquet was a much nicer and more lady-like game than lawn-tennis; she loved an occasional novel, and was a great student of *London Society* and *Belgravia;* poetry, too, she affected, in mild doses, though she had never heard of Rossetti, and held a decided opinion (based on a remark of Mrs. Grant's, the rector's wife) that the poems of Mr. Swinburne were 'horrid'; and she instinctively regarded everything that was unusual, unconventional, and unfamiliar to her, as something to be carefully eschewed. Added to all which she was a most excellent daughter to papa and mamma; obedient, dutiful, and affectionate; and Mrs. Palliser, who had no daughters of her own and was charmed with

dear Rosie's instinctive refinement and propriety, had secretly elected her as the most suitable wife in the world for her son Gerard.

Mr. Palliser entered the room, as already mentioned, with a somewhat preoccupied and cloudy brow. He welcomed Rosie, however, very heartily; and appeared quite pleased when dear Rosie tripped neatly across the room to meet him, offering him her cheek to kiss. Then he sat down with the air of a man who had had a fatiguing day.

"Well, my dear?" said Mrs. Palliser, interrogatively, with an anxious look.

"Well," replied Mr. Palliser, rather slowly. "I saw Jerningham."

"And what does he say?" pursued his wife, as he paused.

"He says," rejoined Mr. Palliser, "that the company is perfectly sound, that nearly the entire capital has been subscribed or promised, and that the discovery itself—the

anti-intoxicant—has been proved a complete success. And he seemed so—well, so hurt at my apparent distrust, that he offered to take my shares back at the price I paid for 'em. He offered me a cheque for the full amount, this very morning, in his own office."

"Which of course you accepted at once," put in the old lady, knitting industriously as usual.

"My dear mother," replied Mr. Palliser, with a crushing look, which, however, was quite lost upon its object, "there are certain canons of honour among business men that you are probably not aware of, but which render any such course of action on my part quite impossible. If I had accepted Jerningham's offer I should never have been able to do any business with him again."

"And that would have been a great misfortune, I suppose," said the old lady, in the most innocent way possible. "I

dare say this gentleman's code of honour is a very strict one, and I must say I think he gave you a fair chance."

"Then the affair is going on all right, Marmaduke?" asked Mrs. Palliser, seeing her husband fume under the old lady's tongue. "When will they commence operations, do you suppose?"

"Well—there seems to be a sort of temporary *hitch* about that," acknowledged Mr. Palliser. "I can't quite make out what the real difficulty is—something about registration, I fancy. And there's some delay just now about the appointment of bankers to the affair. We shall hear more about it, no doubt, in a day or two."

"I *cannot* understand it!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, appealing to the world at large in her perplexity. "Yesterday everything was all right, everything was going on swimmingly; and to-day there are nothing but hitches. *I* never heard of anything like it since I was born."

To Rosie the whole affair seemed very mysterious and important; entirely out of the range of her own little interests and experiences; so she sat quite still, and without understanding in the least what it was about, put on a pretty little air of troubled sympathy. She laid her hand on Mrs. Palliser's, and Mrs. Palliser, eager to take somebody else into her confidence, was just about to tell Rosie the whole story—enormous operations, fabulous returns, number of gallons consumed in England every year multiplied by three-pence halfpenny, the greatest discovery of modern times, and every other feature of it, all inclusive—when luckily dinner was announced. And, with dinner, came Gerard; the result of the combination being that Mrs. Palliser soon forgot her grievances, and rose into her most cheerful vein.

"Well, Gerard, and what have you been doing with yourself to-day?" asked his father, when they were seated at table.

The honest gentleman was partly relieved, but partly nettled, at the absence of any reference on Gerard's part to the business that had occupied him in the City; and wondered whether his son's reticence was prompted by a lack of interest in the subject, or a feeling of delicacy towards himself.

"I was reading at first," said Gerard. "And then I walked to Linford."

"Gerard is such a boy for reading," remarked Mrs. Palliser, turning to Rosie. "He's scarcely ever without a book of some sort in his hand. He takes after me in that," said the good lady, complacently. "I have been reading such a sweet book lately, by Frederika Bremer; you ought to read it, my dear. She *is* such a lovely writer! But dear Gerard's tastes are rather different, I am afraid. What were you reading to-day, Gerard dear?"

"Rabelais," replied Gerard, briefly.

"Is Rabelais a book?" enquired Rosie.

"It is," said Gerard, with an Oxford smile. "In the sense that Byron is a book. He was a French—clergyman."

"Indeed," said Rosie. "Mamma has been reading a book by a French clergyman, too. His name was Pressensé. I must tell her about this one."

"Do," said Gerard, with his gravest air. "Rabelais is a most improving writer. But I would suggest that your mamma reads it in the original. She would probably appreciate it more that way than in a translation."

"Oh yes, mamma is very fond of reading French," said Rosie, innocently. "I have been trying to read a novel lately called 'Esmond.' Have you ever heard of it? But it was dreadfully stupid and uninteresting, and I soon had to give it up. I can't remember who it was by."

"A person of the name of Thackeray, I believe," replied Gerard. "An obscure writer, now dead. He wrote two or three

other novels in his time, and there are a few people, I have heard, who consider 'Esmond' his most successful effort."

Rosie shrugged her shoulders pityingly. Mr. Palliser chuckled, and said, "Never you mind, Rosie; we can't all think alike, can we?"—while Mrs. Palliser got visibly uneasy, and tried to turn the conversation into smoother channels. She did not like to hear Gerard chaffing Rosie so unmercifully; it was a bad omen for the success of her cherished plan.

"Are you going to London for a few weeks this year, Rosie?" she said.

"I don't think so," replied Rosie. "Mamma doesn't like London in the summer. She says it's so noisy and so hot."

"It was charming there three weeks ago," said Mrs. Palliser. "I went up, you know, to do some shopping, and to attend some of the May meetings; and oh, my dear, I did so wish you could have been with us! They

were quite heavenly, some of them. And then there are such lovely sweet preachers in London; and such beautiful singing at some of the churches. Dear Mr. Nightingale preached for an hour and ten minutes the Sunday morning before we came away. You know we'd been rather naughty the night before; we had been to the opera to hear *Faust*. Music is my one temptation. But oh, my dear, I forgot all about it the next morning. The whole thing seemed to vanish. Wasn't it a wonderful sermon, Marmaduke?"

"Mother," said Gerard, "I do think you're the most dissipated woman I ever knew."

"Gerard!" almost shrieked Mrs. Palliser, horrified. "My dearest boy, what in the world will you say next?"

"I call it dissipation," said Gerard, perfectly unmoved. "All that sort of thing is to you what balls and theatres are to other people. I'm sure it can't do you any good. You never look so utterly woe-begone as

when you have just been to church; and all that excitement must be very bad for your digestion. It's that that keeps you so thin."

This was a singularly unkind remark, for if the excellent lady had a touch of vanity it was on account of her slim figure. Mr. Palliser, with the best will in the world, could not keep himself from laughing.

"I think that a little more church-going wouldn't do *you* any harm, my dear," retorted Mrs. Palliser with spirit. "Ah, it's all very well to joke, but it's no joking matter, let me tell you, Gerard. I can't imagine where you got such notions from; certainly not from me, or from your father either."

"Peculiarities have been known to skip a generation," remarked her son, mildly.

"A very neat compliment to me," put in the old lady, speaking for the first time. "I only hope you'll do me credit, my dear, as you grow older."

"Seen anything of your friends the

Mirabels lately, Gerard?" asked Mr. Palliser, helping himself to claret.

"I was there yesterday," said Gerard.

"Do you know the Mirabels?" asked Rosie, turning with a slightly surprised air to Mrs. Palliser.

"Well, dear," replied that correct lady with a deprecating air, "only very slightly. They are more Gerard's friends than ours. Of course they are scarcely the sort of people one generally meets. They don't go to church, you see; and—well, you know, dear, I don't think they're very good style. There's something rather un-English about them, if you understand what I mean."

"I don't think that Dr. Mirabel professes to be very English, does he, mother?" said Gerard, with a touch of that smooth-cheeki ness which every now and then characterised his utterances.

"My dear, don't be absurd," replied Mrs Palliser. "Of course I know that he's a Frenchman; but it wasn't that I meant at

all. And certainly it's nobody's fault but her own that his wife is what she is."

"Quite true, my dear," remarked Mr. Palliser with an ironical bow. "Madame Mirabel is an exceptionally handsome woman; and certainly the fact is not due to any efforts on the part of other members of her sex. She'd no doubt have been plain enough if they had had the making of her."

"I think she must be rather horrid," said Rosie. "Mamma doesn't like her at all, I know."

"Ah, we all know what a Lothario *you* used to be, Marmaduke," retorted Mrs. Palliser, in her sprightliest mood. "Such a lady-killer," turning with a laugh to Rosie. "I was his fifteenth!"

"Seventeenth, my dear," corrected Mr. Palliser.

"There you are, you see," resumed his wife, gaily. "And he even admires Madame Mirabel. But surely, Marmaduke, you can't say that she is good style."

"There are fashions in style, my dear," replied Mr. Palliser, with cheerful evasiveness. "Mirabel himself I don't know much of; I believe he's a very clever fellow in his way, but it's not exactly *my* way. He's eccentric, and I can't bear eccentricity in any shape."

"I've always understood that he's rather horrid too," said Rosie, "but not so much so as his wife."

"In what way is he horrid, Miss Chattering?" asked Gerard, as though for information.

"Oh, I don't know," replied Rosie, vaguely; "different from other people, I suppose, and all that sort of thing. At any rate, we never visit them. Mamma is very strict about such matters, and she always says the Mirabels are not exactly—er"—

"I see," said Gerard.

"Mirabel looks very ill," remarked Mr. Palliser. "The place doesn't seem to have done much for him. How is he just now, Gerard?"

"He's dying fast," replied his son.

"My dear Gerard!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, greatly shocked. "Dying? Are you sure?"

"Quite," said Gerard.

"What an awful thing," said Mrs. Palliser, looking the very picture of misery. "I'm sure I don't know what his religion is. I don't suppose he has any, unhappy man. I wonder whether Mr. Grant, now, wouldn't go and see him. What a frightful state of mind he must be in!"

"Who—Mirabel?" asked Gerard. "Not in the very least. He's a great deal more cheerful than you often are, mother."

"Cheerful!" echoed Mrs. Palliser. "How can a man be cheerful with such an appalling prospect before him? He must be mad, my dear—raving mad. It's terrible to think of. How can an infidel be *cheerful* on his death-bed? Ah, my dear, I have read too much to believe that. He may be cheerful now, because he doesn't realise his

position; but when the time comes, when there is no longer any opportunity"—and Mrs. Palliser, unable to conclude, shut her eyes, and swayed her head from side to side in a manner that implied volumes.

"He is cheerful nevertheless," said Gerard. "He looks forward to death almost with eagerness. I'm very sorry, mother, to upset any theory of yours, and so, I am sure, would Mirabel himself be; he's a very courteous fellow. But still, facts are facts; and I can only tell you that he bears his sufferings heroically, and anticipates his release with the most perfect good humour and satisfaction."

"Release!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, with a slight shudder.

"Does he believe in a future life?" asked Mr. Palliser.

"He does—most obdurately," replied Gerard, with a smile that increased his mother's perplexity.

"But is he a *Christian*, Gerard?" she asked.

"I should say certainly not," said Gerard.

"And yet he believes in a future life, and even looks forward to it with *pleasure?*" pursued Mrs. Palliser, in astonishment.

"So he tells me," answered Gerard, quietly.

"I never heard of such a thing since I was born!" ejaculated the good lady, gazing round the room in her despair of understanding such a paradox.

"Judging by your own account, mother," remarked Gerard, "I should say that the things you have never heard of since you were born would make a considerable library."

Mrs. Palliser tried to look indignant; but, catching sight of Rosie's open eyes and her husband's ill-concealed amusement, she gave it up, and broke into convulsive laughter.

"You're a naughty, undutiful boy, Gerard," she exclaimed, "to make such game of your old mother. Why, Rosie looks quite scandalised. Never mind, Rosie dear; you

don't know Gerard yet. I wouldn't wish for a better son, though he is such an impertinent boy sometimes."

"I can't think what mamma would say if I were to talk to her like that," said Rosie, glancing at Gerard with a look of shy reproof.

"I expect you haven't trained your mamma up in the way she should go," said Mr. Palliser, with a genial smile.

"You see that Gerard has given us a better education, dear Rosie," said Mrs. Palliser, laughing. "I often try my best to be angry with him, but it's no use. He's quite incorrigible, and we must just take him as he is."

"Well, mother," remarked the object of these criticisms, "I think it very possible that you might like the Mirabels rather better if you knew them more. They're rather original, and that of itself is interesting."

"My dear, I'm afraid I don't like original

people," confessed Mrs. Palliser. "I've an instinctive shrinking from people who are different from everybody else, even putting graver considerations aside. They always seem to me not exactly—nice."

"But you're very original yourself, mother," said Gerard, serenely. "You don't imagine that you're a conventional person, do you?"

"*Well*, my dear!" ejaculated Mrs. Palliser, bridling. "I'm sure I don't know what you mean by *that*. What makes you think that I am an unconventional person, pray?"

"I thought I was paying you a compliment," returned her son, calmly.

Mrs. Palliser did not very well know what to say to this; but the old lady, who seldom spoke, owing partly to her deafness, now put in a remark which turned the thoughts of all of them into another channel.

"I saw the new doctor to-day," she said, addressing the company at large. "A fine-

looking man, my dear; straight and well set-up. Perhaps he'll be able to do something for Dr. Mirabel, you know."

"Really, mother?" said Mr. Palliser. "Dr. Lancaster, you mean. Yes, I've heard him very highly spoken of; and I think it's about time we had a change."

"It's a pity he's not married, though," remarked Mrs. Palliser. "I don't care much for an unmarried doctor. Has he attended Dr. Mirabel yet, Gerard?"

"I really don't know," said Gerard. "I suppose they'll call him in, if he's good for anything. But of course it won't be any use."

"You shouldn't cultivate a habit of always looking on the dark side of things, Gerard," said his mother. "If Dr. Lancaster is as clever as your father says he is, how can we tell what he mayn't be able to do? At any rate, let us hope for the best."

"And be prepared for the worst," put in the old lady, in her cheerful way.

"From what I hear," said Mr. Palliser, "I should think it likely that this Dr. Lancaster will be more of an acquisition to the neighbourhood than I was at first inclined to think, apart from his professional abilities. They say he's a man who has travelled a good deal, and that he's remarkably well informed. I'm rather curious to meet him."

"I wonder whether he plays a good rubber," murmured Gerard.

"Just the sort of man who would," remarked Mr. Palliser.

"But he'll have to get married, you know," said his wife, uncompromisingly. "No family doctor ought to be a bachelor. And a married man in good practice would scarcely have much time for whist."

"Well, you had better set about finding a wife for him, my dear," said Mr. Palliser. "It will be something for you to do. There's Rosie, for instance. How should you like to be a doctor's wife, Rosie?"

"Not at all, thank you," said Rosie, with

a slight show of animation. "It must be dreadful never to know whether your husband is coming home to dinner or not. And then, all the diseases, you know—it would be altogether too horrid, wouldn't it, Mrs. Palliser?"

"Oh, very disagreeable indeed, my dear," replied that lady promptly. "No, I don't think you must marry a doctor. We must think of somebody else."

"For Rosie?" asked Mr. Palliser.

"My dear Marmaduke!" exclaimed his wife, reprovingly. "For Dr. Lancaster, of course. Let me see, now. There's Helen Dartley—she's a nice, sensible girl; just the sort of girl to make a good doctor's wife. I fancy she's got a little money of her own, too. Or there's Jenny Adams; not very pretty, perhaps, but quite as good-looking as Helen: and she's clever, too. Or if he wants beauty, well, he won't find a prettier girl in Hampshire than—"

"Now you're going to be personal, my

dear," interposed Mr. Palliser, politely. "How did you manage to meet Dr. Lancaster, mother?"

"No management at all," said the old lady. "It was purely accidental. I was sitting with one of my old cottagers, who is very bad with the rheumatism, when this gentleman came in. He bowed to me, my dear, with the most courtly grace, and I had the pleasure of curtcheying to him in return. 'Madam,' he said, 'I trust I have not called inopportunely.' 'Sir,' I replied, 'no visit could be better timed.' A very handsome, well-bred man, I assure you, my dears, and he was as polite to the poor woman as he was to me."

"I'm glad he seems such a nice man," said Mrs. Palliser. "Which old woman were you visiting this afternoon?"

"The one they call Old Nanny," replied the old lady; "Nanny Goodman is her real name. She lives in that small thatched cottage on the way to Polecat Bottom."

"Oh, I know," said Mrs. Palliser. "I believe she's a very decent body."

"Nanny Goodman?" said Rosie. "Mamma used to visit her at one time, but she found her so ungrateful and obstinate that there was no doing anything with her. Mamma was always telling her how wicked it was to be complaining so constantly about everything, and gave her no end of medicine, and little books, and such things; but she never read the books, I'm sure, and positively refused to take the medicine. And she would persist in taking snuff, though mamma was never tired of telling her what a dirty, wasteful habit it was. Mamma did suspect her of drinking, but that was not quite proved. I dare say she is sober enough. But mamma found it impossible to do her any good, and at last she gave it up. She told her that she was as obstinate as a mule, and has not been near her since."

"She's as sober a woman as I ever knew, my dear," said the old lady, rather sharply.

"But she's dreadfully obstinate and ungrateful," retorted Rosie.

"An embodiment of muliebrity, in fact," said Gerard.

"I wish to goodness some one would teach you the art of blushing, Gerard," exclaimed Mr. Palliser.

"Well, I declare I'm quite anxious to see this new doctor," remarked Mrs. Palliser. "Old Mr. Parkes was never any use; he wasn't a very nice old man, either. Don't you remember, Marmaduke, what a shocking mess he made of it with Gerard? The dear boy would never have recovered if the case had been left to him. It'll be a great mercy if Dr. Lancaster turns out a really clever practitioner. I suppose he will call here soon."

"I heard mamma speaking about Dr. Lancaster only yesterday," said Rosie. "She was wondering where he had come from, and who his people were, you know, and all that. But he's dreadfully reserved, it

seems, and never talks about himself: indeed I believe that Mrs. Fullerton did try once to draw him out, but he always evaded giving her a direct answer, and mamma said she thought it looked a little suspicious."

"Perhaps he is too modest to talk much about himself, Rosie dear," suggested Mrs. Palliser.

"I don't think mamma put it down to that," answered Rosie; "she fancied that it looked as though he had something to hide. You see, mamma always likes to know who everybody is; she says it gives one more confidence, especially in the case of one's medical man."

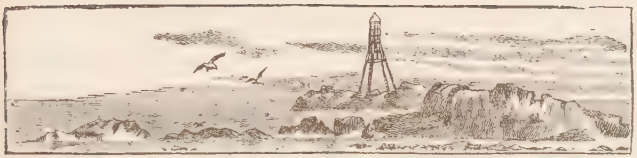
Rosie had a very artless, innocent way of speaking, and she looked very simple and very pretty as she said this. Mr. Palliser hemmed somewhat dubiously, and Gerard's lips took a downward curve, though he made no remark. Truth to tell, however, Rosie's mamma was not the only person in the neighbourhood who was conscious of

feeling some curiosity respecting the doctor. His predecessor had died suddenly of an apoplexy, and for several weeks the practice had remained without any incumbent, the doctors in the nearest villages looking after such cases as there were; then this Dr. Lancaster, of whom nothing or next to nothing was known, except that he had been house-surgeon to a hospital in the north of England, appeared upon the scene, bought the house and surgery from the late practitioner's executors, and quietly took up the practice. He was a tall, dark, handsome man, of grave manners; scarcely a man to be either catechised or patronised, save by the very bold; and while his general appearance was prepossessing, his reticence influenced public curiosity, so that nothing was more natural than that the gossips of the place should fabricate a mystery about him. He did not volunteer any statements respecting his parentage, his circumstances, or his antecedents; in consequence of which he

formed the topic of much interesting speculation, one or two old ladies even going so far as to say that it would be safer, under the circumstances, to discourage his visits. Those who were not so fastidious, however, spoke loudly in his praise; while the very poor, who could not afford to pay him fees, joined in the chorus lustily.

The conversation languished somewhat after dear Rosie's last remark, proceeding fitfully on topics of no particular interest to anybody. Gerard relapsed into his habitual taciturnity, rather to Mrs. Palliser's annoyance; Rosie chitter-chattered away in an aimless fashion, but failed to arouse much enthusiasm in her listeners; Mr. Palliser's thoughts reverted to the five hundred pounds he had so quixotically risked, and the old lady began to nod. At last Mrs. Palliser made a move, much to the general relief. But she could not help wishing, as she did so, that dear Gerard would be a little more demonstrative in his manner to

dear Rosie. Of course it was impossible that she should fail to interest and attract him; and the good lady was extremely fearful lest Gerard's cool bearing towards her pet and *protégée* should work harm for him in dear Rosie's eyes.



CHAPTER IV.

A TRULY CHRISTIAN ACT.

NOW Mrs. Palliser, though not without her prejudices, was a conscientious woman as well as a very kind one; and a few days' reflection upon her son's remarks about the Mirabels led her to the conviction that a friendly call would not, perhaps, be too great a stretch of Christian charity considering the circumstances. And the resolution did her credit. Every instinct of her nature was repelled by what she had heard of Madame Mirabel and her opinions; every nerve in her body was chafed by the hardness and the coldness, the uncompromising speech, the offensive imperturbability, which

characterised the young doctor's wife. Indeed, no two women could have been more mutually antipathetic; for Madame Mirabel herself made no secret of the dislike she felt for the elder lady, whom she regarded as a very flighty, shallow, narrow-minded person, with whom it was impossible to have a single thought in common; and the probability is that Mrs. Palliser was instinctively conscious of the fact. It will be acknowledged, therefore, that when the good lady put on the pretty new bonnet which set off her grey curls so becomingly, and a pair of elegant pale kid gloves, preparatory to her intended visit, she really was performing an act of social and religious heroism.

Even the drawing-room into which she was shown gave her an uneasy feeling. It was so different, somehow, from most drawing-rooms. The furniture was comfortable enough; but there was no pretty feminine litter about — no dainty work-baskets, no flowers, none of those thousand-and-one

indescribable and probably nameless nick-nacks which make a room so homelike and so gracefully untidy. The one symptom of human tastes and interests that it contained was a large round table, pushed away in a corner, and covered with miscellaneous literature. A good deal of this was French. There were the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, the *Nouvelle Revue*, and several scientific magazines in the same language; a copy of 'Anna Karénina,' another of the 'Kreutzer Sonata,' a few French novels of the *Décadence*, one or two numbers of *Nature*, a volume of Ibsen's Plays, Kant's 'Critique of Pure Reason' in English, a life of Schopenhauer, and three works by M. Richepin. Mrs. Palliser, having nothing better to do, turned them over, with an expression half-curious, half-perplexed, in her eyes. She had indeed penetrated into an enemy's country. First, with an enquiring and indulgent smile, she took up a book of Bourget's, and read a page or two. This she suddenly put down, with

a faint colour in her face, and turned over the leaves of one of the scientific periodicals. The unfamiliar terminology conveyed no impression to her mind, but it was at least inoffensive; then she laid her hand upon the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, which she opened at an article entitled 'La Démoralisation de l'Allemagne,' which did not interest her very much. She was just laying it aside, with a view to taking up the next book upon the table—'Les Fleurs de la Philosophie'—when the door opened and Madame Mirabel appeared.

"How do you do, Madame Mirabel?" said Mrs. Palliser, advancing, after a moment's hesitation. The poor lady had imagined that her hostess would have greeted her first; but Madame Mirabel's face wore only an expression of slight surprise, and on entering the room she had contented herself with a rather cold inclination of the head.

"It is very good of you to call upon me,"

she replied, taking the other's offered hand with a formal air. "Won't you sit down?"

Poor Mrs. Palliser did as she was invited, feeling, however, somewhat chilled. "I was so sorry to hear such a sad account of Dr. Mirabel, the other day," she said, plunging *in medias res* in her unaccustomed nervousness. "I trust he does not suffer much?"

"My husband is very ill," said Madame Mirabel. "He suffers, certainly; and I am afraid there is much suffering still in store for him. But he has his consolations."

"Ah, we need consolations when it comes to that, don't we," murmured Mrs. Palliser, sympathetically. "I feel for you so much—so very much. My own dear husband has never had a day's illness; we have everything to be thankful for in that respect. Does Dr. Mirabel keep up his spirits pretty well?"

"His spirits are excellent, thank you," answered Madame Mirabel, briefly.

"Really!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser.

"You seem surprised," remarked the

other, with the ghost of a smile. "I suppose that according to all precedent a man in his position ought to be rather solemn than otherwise. But he isn't—not one bit. I'm afraid it's rather bad form."

The tone in which this was said struck Mrs. Palliser as unnecessarily aggressive. She drew herself up a little, and folded her hands upon her lap; then, having collected her thoughts, said,—

"Surely, dear Madame Mirabel, it is scarcely a question of 'form.' Anybody who is as ill as I fear poor Dr. Mirabel seems to be is in a solemn position, and has cause to feel solemnly about it. But a man may be solemn and yet not unhappy. We, you know, who have a blessed hope of everlasting life, have no cause to sorrow as those who have no hope. And I hear that your poor husband does look forward to a future life," added the good lady, though she blushed with a sense of her own hypocrisy as she said it.

"Let me get you some tea," said Madame Mirabel, rising to ring the bell. "Yes, you are quite right; my husband believes in the continuity of experience, and I have no doubt whatever that it contributes in no small degree to his cheerfulness."

This way of putting it sounded a great deal too scientific to be satisfactory, and Mrs. Palliser leant back in her chair feeling less convinced than ever. Belief in a future life based on science was simply valueless to her, because science was, in the good lady's view, the natural antagonist of revealed religion; and the notion of a revealed truth being independently proved or taught by science was to her as subversive of the natural order of things as the introduction of universal suffrage by the Tories would seem to an advanced Liberal. But it was difficult for her to put her disagreement into words without appearing controversial, and so she wisely refrained her lips.

"Of course he wants for nothing," she

said, tentatively. "I should be so thankful if we could do anything for him; I hope, Madame Mirabel, you will always make any use of me, you know—"

"Oh, thank you very much," replied the other, quickly. "He has everything he requires. He is an excellent patient, and our medical man is as attentive as possible. He could not be in better hands than he is."

"That is well," remarked Mrs. Palliser. "May I ask who is attending him?"

"Dr. Lancaster," said Madame Mirabel, with the very slightest heightening of colour.

"Oh, really," said the elder lady. "We have heard excellent accounts of Dr. Lancaster, but not yet had the pleasure of meeting him. Have you known him long?"

"About three weeks," replied Madame Mirabel. "He is very good to my husband; he sits and talks with him. In fact, he is upstairs now."

"Is he indeed?" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser with interest.

"Yes," said Madame Mirabel, indifferently. "I dare say he will be down directly. He generally comes in for a cup of tea before going away."

Just then the door opened, and a servant entered with the tea. Madame Mirabel rose from her seat, and busied herself with the tea-caddy, while the visitor sat hoping that the new doctor would speedily make his appearance. It was difficult work to get on unaided with so very antipathetic a person as her hostess, and a third party would be a very welcome relief; besides which, she was naturally curious to see what sort of a man the doctor really was.

She had not long to wait. Before she had got through her first cup a man's steps were heard descending the stairs, and the next moment Dr. Lancaster entered the room. As old Mrs. Palliser had said, he was a man of striking appearance—tall, dark, handsome, and short-bearded, with deep-set eyes and a firmly-moulded, high-bridged nose, which

gave his face a look of unusual decision and strength. Mrs. Palliser found herself involuntarily regarding him with considerable interest, not unmixed with admiration; impressions which were enhanced by the grave and gentle courtesy of the doctor's manner, the faultless ease which characterised his gestures, and the precise simplicity of his dress.

Madame Mirabel turned almost brusquely toward him as he appeared, with a marked increase of alacrity. For a moment she looked pleased and eager; then she performed the ceremony of introduction in her usual indifferent style, and relapsed into taciturnity, leaving her two guests to improve the occasion of making each other's acquaintance at their leisure. At first, as was only natural, the conversation was confined to civilities. Dr. Lancaster said very little; Mrs. Palliser, inclined to be more expansive, being thus forced to take the lead. She talked of the neighbourhood

and its bracing climate; hoped he would soon have time to explore the surrounding country; trusted that he was comfortably installed in his house, and had good servants; and finally began to enumerate the most visitable people of her acquaintance. The doctor received her advances with the utmost modesty and gratitude, and carried her another cup of tea.

"And then there are the Grants, you know," said the excellent lady, warming to her subject. "Mr. Grant is our rector; not very high—but still, a little inclined that way, you know. The Chatterings I dare say you've met already. Oh, no—I shouldn't say that Mr. Grant was at all extreme; but of course such things are always judged so differently by different people. It all depends upon what one is accustomed to. You have not met Mr. Grant yet, I think you said, Dr. Lancaster?"

"Not yet," replied the doctor, who had not said anything at all about it.

"I am sure you would like him," she continued. "He is a very clever man, I believe—very well read, you know, and all that. They say his acquaintance with the Early Fathers is something perfectly extraordinary!"

"I always esteem it a privilege to meet people who can tell me things of which I am entirely ignorant myself," said the doctor, smiling courteously. "Is there a Mrs. Grant?"

"Oh dear, yes!" answered Mrs. Palliser, to whom the idea of an unmarried clergyman was almost as distasteful as that of an unmarried doctor. "Oh, yes; certainly there's a Mrs. Grant. And a very excellent woman she is, too; just the right woman for a clergyman's wife. She's quite her husband's right hand in parish work. You'll no doubt come across her constantly in your visits among the poor. There's Mrs. Chattering, too; most indefatigable, I believe she is, and so generous in the way of medicines,

you know, to those who require keeping up but can't afford to pay. You're sure to meet *her* soon, if you haven't done so already," added Mrs. Palliser, with a little laugh.

Dr. Lancaster raised his eyebrows with a slightly whimsical expression. "I have been here scarcely a month," he said, "and I have already thrown no fewer that fourteen medicine-bottles out of the windows of different cottages, and taken good care that they should break, too. I never asked who the charitable donor was, but I know that the contents of the bottles were exceedingly pernicious to my patients."

"Well, Dr. Lancaster, you *have* done for yourself, then!" cried Mrs. Palliser, laughing gaily. "Poor Mrs. Chattering; no wonder she"—here the good lady stopped short on the brink of an indiscretion. "Well, no doubt you were quite right; oh, perfectly right, of course. Mrs. Chattering is a woman of the very best intentions, but she is a little peculiar perhaps—she has her little weak-

nesses, you know, like the rest of us. I do think, however, that you will like the Grants."

"I have no doubt I shall," replied the doctor, courteously. "It is in the power of a rector's wife to be a most efficient help to a medical man—supposing that she does not lay claim to any prerogative in connection with the pharmacopeia," he added, with a grave smile. "Every parish clergyman ought to have a wife, supposing his choice a wise one."

"I thoroughly agree with you," replied Mrs. Palliser, cordially. "And I hope you do not limit your approval of marriage to the case of clergymen," she ventured to add, with a beaming smile.

"By no means," said the doctor, seriously. "No man should go through life — unmarried."

Both ladies darted a look at him. "Then why don't you marry yourself?" was the question which arose in Mrs. Palliser's mind;

though of course she did not give utterance to it. Madame Mirabel's glance was one of swift enquiry, as though she sought to read the thought that was passing in his mind; and a momentary pause ensued. Then Madame Mirabel suddenly rose.

"Excuse me one moment," she said, hastily; "I am just going to see my husband."

She had passed out before Dr. Lancaster had time to open the door for her, and the two were left alone. Then Mrs. Palliser said,—

"I am sorry to hear that Dr. Mirabel is in such a sad state."

"Yes," replied the other. "He is very ill. But he may still last some time, with proper care."

"I feel very glad to think that he is in such good hands," said Mrs. Palliser.

"His is scarcely a case in which the best of doctors can be of much service," was the reply. "He has a better doctor than I am

—his indomitable cheerfulness. It is strange, the influence that mind has over matter. I have known some men who have almost seemed to keep themselves alive for months by the mere force of their own powerful wills. A sick man who makes up his mind he is going to die lessens his chances of life very materially. This is often noticed among Eastern nations—Turks and Hindoos, for instance. The curious thing about our friend upstairs is that he does not cling to life—he scarcely seems anxious to recover; and yet this very indifference, coupled with his remarkable curiosity as to the experiences which lie before him after the inevitable change has come, induces a cheerfulness and equanimity eminently favourable to him from a pathological point of view. It is in many ways a very unusual case, and one that interests me very deeply."

"How wonderful!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser.

"He is altogether a most interesting man," continued Dr. Lancaster. "He has a culti-

vated mind, and a sweetness of disposition that is very winning. By the way, he was speaking to me just now of a young gentleman who I fancy must be your son—a Mr. Gerard Palliser. He seems to have taken a great liking to him."

"Oh yes, to be sure," said Mrs. Palliser, smiling. "Gerard told me he had been to see him lately."

"And I hope he will continue his visits, so long as he does not excite or fatigue the patient," replied Dr. Lancaster.

"Of course," assented Mrs. Palliser. "I am delighted to think Gerard can be of any use to him, poor young man. Well, I am glad he is so well off for kind, sympathetic friends. It is most fortunate for him, I am sure, that you should have settled in the neighbourhood."

It was curious that neither of them seemed to include the sick man's wife in the number of his sympathisers; and yet no one could say that she was remiss in her duties to him.

She was as careful and conscientious in their discharge as though she had been a qualified hospital-nurse; and if her manners to the world were somewhat cold—what then? All women do not wear their hearts upon their sleeves. And there could be no doubt that her husband, at any rate, was very fond of her.

She came back shortly afterwards, and Mrs. Palliser rose to take her leave. Chilled by her hostess's reserve, she was delighted to have met Dr. Lancaster, who, with an apology for not having called earlier, begged permission to repair his error in a day or two; and she had suddenly conceived a great interest in Dr. Mirabel. This was often the way with the excellent lady. Any strong appeal to her sympathy made a breach in her prejudices at once, bringing out all that was warm and genial in her nature, and converting her there and then into an enthusiastic partisan: and in the present case her new-born kindness for the

sick man was much increased by her sorrow that he should be tied to such a very objectionable wife.

It was a bright, sunshiny afternoon, and the moorland looked very beautiful in its covering of gold and purple. Mrs. Palliser, enjoying the fresh breeze, and full of her own thoughts, stepped almost jauntily along, smiling graciously upon the little rustics as they pulled their forelocks to her, and running over in her mind the account of her experiences with which she intended to regale her husband that evening at dinner. At last she arrived at the turning which led to her house,—a lane running at right angles to the road she had been traversing; and there, at the corner, she met a lady, coming from the opposite direction. The lady was thin, and faded, and rather short, with light eyes and hair that had once been flaxen; she was richly and expensively dressed, and wore a handsome ostrich-feather in her bonnet, and altogether looked like a lady in very

comfortable circumstances indeed. We have heard of her already, and we have met her daughter.

"Ah, Mrs. Palliser!" she exclaimed, holding out her delicately gloved hand with an *empressé* air.

"Ah, Mrs. Chattering!" said the other lady, in the same breath.

"And so you're taking a walk," remarked the new-comer, in a thin, sharp voice. "It's a delicious day, isn't it? One almost gets tired of the sunshine, I declare. I've just been my rounds, and I'm positively tired to death. Ah, my dear Mrs. Palliser, I think you're perfectly right never to go near cottagers. Of all ungrateful, stupid, obstinate people—and then, you know, they *will* keep their windows shut; just think of that, now, on a day like this, so you may imagine what the air's like inside—and it's no use *my* saying anything, for they don't listen if I do; I positively think they prefer bad smells to fresh air. I know what I should do if I

had *my* way with them; and oh, what do you think? No fewer than three of my medicine-bottles thrown away, out of the windows, Mrs. Palliser—such wicked waste, and such impertinence, you know; the people actually have no shame, my dear, and when they have they tell such shocking falsehoods—really I quite despair of them sometimes, and when I tell Mr. Chattering about it he only laughs and says I had better appeal to the new doctor, a man we none of us know anything about, which oughtn't to be the case with one's medical man. Not that he isn't a gentlemanly-looking person, and I dare say knows his business, but when it's a question of somebody who's got to come into your very house and bedrooms, my dear, I do think we ought to know everything there is to be known about him before we call him in."

Here Mrs. Chattering paused for breath; and Mrs. Palliser remarked,—

"But I have just been having a most

agreeable conversation with Dr. Lancaster, Mrs. Chattering. I think myself he's a delightful man, and"—

"Have you really?" interrupted Mrs. Chattering, eagerly. "What a pity I didn't happen to meet you first; you might have told him about those wicked people throwing away my medicine-bottles. As a doctor he would naturally sympathise with me, and no doubt a word from him would go a long way, for cottagers think such a deal of doctors, you know, and—oh, by the bye, where did you see him? Nobody ill at home, I hope? We haven't had an illness in our house for years, my dear, and I can't help thinking it's a sort of acknowledgment from Providence of my labours among the poor, because you see we're told that the poor we shall have always with us, and—no, that isn't it—oh, it's about giving to the poor being the same as lending to the Lord, you know—not that I approve of always bringing Scripture in as Methodists do, but

it seems a case in point—and *where* did you say you met Dr. Lancaster just now?"

"It was at Madame Mirabel's," replied Mrs. Palliser. "Her poor husband is very ill, you know, and he seems such a dear, sweet man from what I hear"—

"Madame Mirabel's!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattering, opening her eyes. "My dear Mrs. Palliser, I hadn't a notion you knew the Mirabels. Surely they're not—a—the proper sort of people to know much of. They *never* go to church, or give anything that *I* ever heard of to the missionaries, and what they have to live upon I'm sure *I* don't know, though I suppose they must have something, for I haven't actually heard of their running into debt for their butcher's-meat; but still you see they are so different from all the rest of us, and I've been so terrified lest dear Rosie should meet the woman anywhere—of course her husband, as you say, is confined to his room—for I'm sure she can't be a nice woman, all full of

those horrid socialistic, infidel notions that one picks up abroad, I expect"—

"Well, I can't say I admire Madame Mirabel particularly myself, dear Mrs. Chattering," interrupted Mrs. Palliser, "and certainly I don't think she would be a very suitable companion for dear Rosie. But I believe her husband is really a very charming man, and as she is almost always with him there is not much chance of Rosie coming across her."

"Why, you didn't *see* Dr. Mirabel, did you?" enquired Mrs. Chattering. "How do you know he's so charming?"

"I only spoke according to Dr. Lancaster's account," said Mrs. Palliser, deprecatingly.

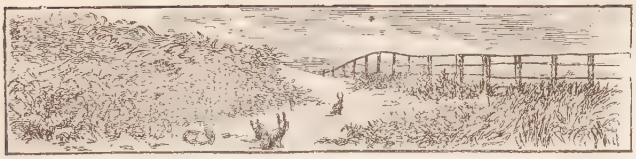
"Oh!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattering, as much as to say that she didn't think much of *that* authority. "Well, that is only one man we know nothing about vouching for another man we know nothing about; for I don't suppose there are a dozen people in the place who ever spoke to Dr. Mirabel at all.

Besides, my dear, there's no knowing,—very likely they used to know each other abroad; *we* know what life abroad is in some of those countries—India, you know, and all that—and there's no doubt that Madame Mirabel's a handsome woman according to some tastes, and it's only natural that a man like Dr. Lancaster should admire her.—Oh *no*," in deprecation of Mrs. Palliser's look of indignant protest, "of *course* I'm not hinting at any love-affair, because we none of us know anything about it; I only say that if all these people *did* know each other abroad, why you see they might have met before the Mirabels were married, and there's no knowing, you see, because we really know so very little about any of them that it's just as well to be on our guard, especially those of us who have children, for there's nothing so bad as insidious example"—

"Really, my dear Mrs. Chattering," interposed Mrs. Palliser, "I think you are scarcely justified in expressing such very

injurious suspicions. Indeed, I am sure you are mistaken. I must be going on now; but do let me advise you to make Dr. Lancaster's acquaintance yourself as soon as possible, and whatever you do don't forget to speak to him about those medicine-bottles."

Good Mrs. Palliser was totally unable to resist that last little bit of mischief. Mrs. Chattering, not unaccustomed to be pulled up in mid-career, took her dismissal good-humouredly enough, and the two ladies parted on smiling terms. Little did either of them suspect the strange events which were destined to follow the very ordinary occurrences of that afternoon, and the part that two at least of our acquaintances were to take in them.



CHAPTER V.

"THE INFLUENCE OF THE MAN HIMSELF."

DR. LANCASTER lost no time in paying his promised visit to the Pallisers, where he made a very favourable impression upon the whole family. The two ladies were charmed with the deferential courtesy of his manners; Mr. Palliser, intellectually a very lazy man, and taking but small interest in literary and scientific subjects, appreciated the breadth and ease of his conversation upon the topics of the day; even the critical Gerard was attracted by him, though not at first. It was only when Dr. Lancaster, in the course of discussing some

phase of village life, dropped a rather abstract remark about the influence of ideals on social and individual progress, that the youth recognised in him a kindred intellect.

The interest that Gerard took in the Mirabels was now shared by his parents. It would be a mistake, however, to suppose that it was of the same kind in both cases. With the elder people the feeling took the form of natural human sympathy, tempered by many a headshake at the heterodoxy of the sufferer himself, and still more strongly by the unconquerable dislike of Mrs. Palliser for his wife. "It is impossible for me to like such a cold, unwomanly person, Marmaduke," she would say regretfully. Gerard would remark that Madame Mirabel was cold because she had been treated coldly; and the two would thereupon launch out into a laboured wrangle about the interaction of causes and effects, in which the poor lady would flounder hopelessly for about five minutes, and then have

to give it up. Gerard's interest was of a more analytical order. The character of Madame Mirabel excited his attention and curiosity; it was complex, unusual; it afforded an attractive subject for study and investigation. Added to this was a sincere admiration for what he had called the lady's heroism,—the stoical intrepidity of her bearing under circumstances so painful and so distressing; and if any one had been foolish enough to hint that such admiration was at all heightened or buttressed up by a consciousness of the lady's beauty, he would have met with the most untempered scorn. With regard to Dr. Mirabel, Gerard's feelings were somewhat simpler. He had contracted a cordial friendship with the dying man, and did what he could to keep him cheerful. He liked him and he pitied him. He was also very curious to hear that theory of his about the continuity of existence—a hypothesis utterly unsupported, as far as he knew, by any scientific

sanction whatever; but the prospect of argument attracted him, and he began to look forward quite eagerly to hearing all that Dr. Mirabel had to say upon the subject.

The opportunity soon came. He was a tolerably regular visitor now, and was on fairly familiar terms with both of them. A week or so after Dr. Lancaster's call he strolled round about five o'clock, in expectation of a cup of tea. Madame Mirabel was in the drawing-room, with her hat on.

"I'm so glad you've come," she said in her straightforward fashion as he entered. She had been wearing a strangely preoccupied look when his knock was heard, and this now gave place to a bright, frank smile of pleasure. Gerard wondered that he never properly remarked before how handsome she really was.

"Then please give me some tea," he returned, sinking into a chair. "You're looking wonderfully well to-day, Madame Mirabel."

"Yes, I manage to keep up," she replied, indifferently.

"How is the doctor?" asked Gerard.

"Wonderfully well too, considering," said his wife. "He is better and stronger to-day than he has been for weeks."

"I'm delighted to hear it," said Gerard. "Has Lancaster been yet?"

"Dr. Lancaster has just left," said Madame Mirabel. "And now you have come. You are both very good to us."

She raised her eyes and looked full at him as she said this. There was something almost electrical in the straight flash of her blue eyes, and Gerard felt a momentary shock from the force of it.

"You know there's nothing I wouldn't do for you," he said, curtly.

"It was your kindness to my husband I was thinking of," she replied, with all her usual reserve. "And I am now going to take advantage of it to go out and get a little fresh air. I've been indoors for two days, and feel nearly stifled."

"I'll gladly sit with Dr. Mirabel while you are away," said Gerard, putting his cup down.

"Thank you," said Madame Mirabel, rising. "You're sure you won't think me rude? I positively pine for a breeze."

"You couldn't be rude if you tried to," exclaimed Gerard, almost impulsively.

A somewhat sardonic curl played upon her lips as she wondered whether Gerard's mother would be ready to endorse that opinion. "I should indeed be inhuman were I to treat you with anything but the sincerest gratitude," she replied, with one of her sudden smiles, as she held out her ungloved hand. There was something strangely attractive about the woman when the hidden fire broke every now and then through the mask of her habitual coldness. Then she went swiftly out, leaving Gerard to go upstairs alone to her husband's room.

Dr. Mirabel was sitting at the open window with his back to the door, puffing

a medicated cigarette. He put his hand up, over the back of the chair, to greet Gerard, without altering his position; while Gerard, with his unfailing consideration, sat down beside him silently. There was no necessity for any salutations between the two, and it was uniformly Gerard's object to save his friend as much exertion as he could.

"I knew you would come," said Mirabel, at last. "I have been reading that little book of yours—you remember? It is good —it is very good. He was a wise man, your Monsieur Arnold. Perhaps I shall meet him some day, and then I will tell him about you."

"I should hope you'd find some rather more interesting subject than that," said Gerard, smiling.

"I don't think so," said the other, brightly. "I should never have known him but for you. Has my wife gone out?"

"Yes," said Gerard.

"Ah! poor Julie," breathed Mirabel, with a sigh. "It is very hard for her. She think that when I die we shall never meet again. She is wrong—quite wrong. But I cannot convince her, and so—what will you? It is a great pity—a very great pity for us both."

"I wish you'd give *me* a chance of being convinced," said Gerard, seizing his opportunity. "Tell me what this theory of yours is. The idea interests me deeply, and I am quite open to conviction."

"Yes, I think you are," exclaimed Dr. Mirabel, with animation. "Well, I will tell you if you like, and then you can form your judgment. But first please give me another cigarette."

Gerard reached him the box, struck a vesta for him, and shook up his cushions. Mirabel threw himself back in his chair with a sigh expressive of content. He paused thoughtfully for a minute or so, and then said, slowly—

"You want to know on what I base my belief in a continuation of life after the death of the body. In one word: I base it on the fact that we have two bodies, and not one only."

"Two bodies?" exclaimed Gerard, surprised.

"First of all," continued Mirabel, "we are confronted with a fact we cannot deny, but which has to be accounted for. I mean Consciousness. Life is wonderful enough, life is a great mystery, but Consciousness occupies a higher plane even than life. Many things have life that are not conscious of their own existence.

"Now we need not perplex ourselves by attempting to analyse Consciousness, as do the psychologists of the day. They talk about their percepts and their concepts and their recepts until the brain turns round. But there is one phase of Consciousness that is important—I mean physical sensation. You want something more than organism to

account for that. Suppose I stick a pin into your leg, you feel the prick, and you cry 'Aoûh!' Now, what part of you is it that feels?"

"The brain, I believe," said Gerard, hesitatingly.

"But you don't feel the prick in your head!" retorted the doctor. "You feel it in your leg. Yet flesh and skin cannot feel all by themselves. They are nothing but so much matter. Where do they get the power to feel from? The brain? — the nerves? But your brain and your nerves is nothing but matter too.* They are nothing but the machinery. No, you want something more than all that, *mon ami*, and that is just what the *matérialistes* do not understand."

"Yes, I think I see that," assented Gerard.

* "No instance can be mentioned in which sensation and intelligence appear to result from any combination of the particles of matter."—*Dugald Stewart.*

"Now then," resumed Dr. Mirabel, raising himself a little, with excitement in his eyes. "Now we come to the point. You have had a great scientific man in England here who offers us the true explanation of it all, though he does not see how far his explanation goes and what it leads to. I mean the professor Clifford. What does the professor Clifford say? Why, he say that to every molecule of the organic matter composing your body there is attached an atom of something he can't find a proper name for, and so he call it *mindstuff*. Just think what that means. The mindstuff is co-extensive with the material of our body, atom for atom, point for point; as inextricably mixed up with it as sugar that is dissolved in water —we are very fond of *eau sucrée*, you know, we Frenchmen—or as oxygen and hydrogen are in the water they form together. Now do you see why your leg feels the pain when it is pricked? Thus we have two bodies, and as they are mathematically co-extensive

with each other, coinciding each to each, as you say in the geometry, it follows that the one you can't see must be the exact facsimile of the one you can. It is the mind-body which thinks, by which we move and feel. And you cannot separate the two—unless you commit murder—any more than you can separate the sugar from the water without a chemical precipitation. It is only by death that the separation can take place, and then the mind-body is set free."

"But how can you tell that it survives the death of the material body?" asked Gerard.

"What is there to kill it?" replied the doctor. "Do you think your knives or your bullets or your poisons can touch the so subtle material of the mind?* It is in-

* "When we reflect on the difference between the operations of mind and the qualities of matter, it appears much more wonderful that the *two substances* should be so intimately united as we find them actually to be, than to suppose that the former may exist in a conscious and intelligent state when separated from the latter."—*Dugald Stewart.*

tangible! You might as well try and grasp the faint specks and threads of gossamer you see moving in front of your eyes. Besides, its survival has been proved a thousand thousand times. People believe not all the stories that are told of apparitions after death or at the moment of death. They are right, because they do not understand how such things can be. Well, here is the explanation. I tell you, such cases are too numerous, too well-authenticated by many competent and trustworthy witnesses, to be pooh-poohed. What they call a ghost is simply the mind-body of a person whose material body is dead. It is the *real man*, set free from the gross substance which encumbered him. I do not believe a great deal I find in the Bible, but I find in my theory an explanation of some of it. Take what is related of Jésus-Christ after he was dead. He reappeared, he was recognised, he passed bodily through a wooden door that was fast shut. Well, that was the mind-body of him, a facsimile

of the dead material body, independent of space and material obstacles. Or take Saint-Paul. He knew all about it; he agree with me. 'There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body,' says Saint-Paul. Here I give you the scientific theory which proves he is right. And, ah, he is like me. He want to be free from it. He long for the separation. 'O the miserable I am!' he says, 'who will deliver me from this dead body of mine'?"

"It sounds as though it ought to be true," said Gerard, reflectively.

"It is true," replied Mirabel. "It explains an enormous number of things that can be explained no other way. Think what it means, now, in some of its details. Every corpuscle of blood, every spherule of bodily humour, has its counterpart of mind-stuff. What mystery, now, is there in the heredity, in the reappearance in your character and mine of the idiosyncracies of our parents or even our most remotest ancestors? Where

is the difficulty people see in the influence of mind upon matter and matter upon mind? The professor Tyndall says that the passage from the physics of the brain to the corresponding facts of consciousness is unthinkable. Is it so now? We feel with our minds, they say. True; for we cannot touch the tiniest spot of our bodies that is free from mind-stuff. And the mind-stuff dominates every thing. It cheats the body, and uses it like the lump of clay it is. You have heard of hypnotism? Well, you know, the great hypnotists can apply a Spanish blister to a patient who is under their influence, and if they tell him it is vaseline or cold-cream, not only will he believe it, but the effect of the blister upon the skin will be that of cold-cream and not of a blister. Or they may put cold-cream on him and tell him it is Spanish fly, and immediately the skin will inflame and smart and develope a frightful sore. That is produced by the mind of one man acting upon

the mind of another man, and *his* mind acting upon his body. Yes, the body is the drudge, the servant, the heavy weight; it suffers, it is abused, it has to work, and it gradually wears out; then the mind, the strong, pure, subtle mind-body, which is the real essence of the man, is released from its degrading companionship, and revels in its new-found liberty."

"I don't quite grasp it all yet," observed Gerard, after a pause. "The difference between mind and matter is so essential that it is difficult to see how one can act upon the other. One is tangible, the other belongs to a different category—you can't class them together. The idea of mind acting on matter or matter acting on mind seems as absurd to me as to say you could catch a thought and shut it up in a cage like a canary."

"Quite so," replied the doctor; "that is simply because you haven't realised all that is implied in the expression 'mind-stuff.'

You look upon it as a figure of speech. That is just what it is not. *Mind is matter*, only in a form so subtle as entirely to escape our senses under ordinary conditions. You would not deny the materiality of oxygen or carbonic acid, would you, simply because you cannot carve it with a knife? And yet either might very easily kill you, *mon ami*, one as well as the other."

"But if mind is in fact material, it might be destroyed, just as the body is," objected Gerard.

"That is the very reason it cannot be, *mon cher* Gerard," replied the doctor; "surely you forget that matter is indestructible?"

"But in its entirety, as a mind-body, it might be—just as the visible body is when its parts are disintegrated after death," said Gerard, annoyed at his mistake.

"That of course is possible," acknowledged Mirabel, "but only under conditions too remote from our experience for us to judge

of. What is certain to me is that the mind-body survives its separation from the visible body, and further than that I do not care to go. I am quite willing to take my chance of what may become of me in the far future. Perhaps there are other changes in store—countless changes, even. Well, let them come. I shall welcome all, in view of the great experiences that they will bring."

Dr. Mirabel laid his head back upon the cushions, a little exhausted by his efforts. Gerard remained silent, thinking over what he had heard. Of course he was far from being convinced, but the doctor's theories were new to him, and he felt attracted to them in spite of his predispositions to the contrary. Any how, for Mirabel's sake, he determined that he would not pursue the subject further on that day.

"I'm awfully obliged to you for telling me all this," he said at last. "You've given me a great deal to think of. Now you'd better rest, and not talk any more."

The doctor smiled. "And you may give me some lemonade, if you please," he said. "I feel rather thirsty. It's on the table just outside the door."

Gerard brought him the liquid, and the invalid drank it eagerly. "Ah, that is good," he said. "When the vitality is low, the simplest pleasures are the most enjoyed. What is the time just now?"

"A quarter-past six," said Gerard, glancing at the clock.

"Julie will be soon back now," remarked the doctor.

"I wonder whether it would hurt you to go out a little," suggested Gerard. "We're having a wonderful spell of fine weather; it might even do you good to have an occasional drive."

"Yes, it might—it is possible," said the other, doubtfully. "I will ask my good Lancaster the next time he come."

"You like him, don't you?" asked Gerard.

"*Mais oui*," replied Mirabel. "He is

one of the best men I have known. He do me great good; I am better, now, for some days past. I feel more strong, more light. I think it is the influence of the man himself. He seems to understand me, somehow, and he make me confide myself in him altogether. You have seen him—*hein?*"

"He was calling at our place the other day," said Gerard. "Yes, I liked what I saw of him very much."

"I think I feel like dozing," said Mirabel after a pause. "I will shut the eyes for a little. Ah, I love the open air. It must be good to die out of doors."

"I don't believe you're going to die at all," said Gerard on the spur of the moment.

"*Quien sabe?*" murmured the other, lying comfortably back with closed eyes.

In a few minutes he was asleep. Gerard, struck by some subtle—perhaps imaginary—alteration in his appearance, sat and watched him silently. The man really was looking

better. He seemed stronger, too; his cough had scarcely troubled him at all the whole afternoon, and there was less hectic brightness on his cheek. Yet it was scarcely possible, thought Gerard, that he should really recover. What disease gave rise to more fallacious hopes than consumption, or allowed its victim the enjoyment of better spirits or more delusive gleams of returning vigour? And it was known to be incurable, when past a certain stage.

Then a curious thought struck him, suggested by the sleeping man's own theory. Had this intangible, powerful, mysterious wraith he believed in—this unseen mind-body, this double of one's self—any potency to arrest or to hasten the dissolution of the material frame? Surely, in a union so close, so intimate, there must be mutual influences, —nay, there were—and, that being so, it was clear that the stronger must prevail in the long run. To what end, then, was this influence being exerted in Dr. Mirabel's

own case: was it working for life or for death?

Here another thought occurred to him. In the case of hypnotism referred to by Mirabel, there was the fact of one man's mind acting indirectly upon some one else's body—through the medium, that is, of the mind of the patient himself. Could this throw any light upon the matter? Of course he might be mistaken altogether. The apparent improvement might exist in his imagination only. He had not the eye of an expert, and his judgment was worth next to nothing. Still it seemed undeniable that, when he had seen him some weeks previously, the day he had met Madame Mirabel on Gibbet Hill, the patient was to all appearance dying rapidly. At that time he had been under Dr. Lancaster for no more than a few days, and it was no secret that the physician had had a bad opinion of his case. Now there was a decided improvement; an improvement so

gradual as to have been almost imperceptible, but, at the stage where it had by then arrived, scarcely to be mistaken. Mirabel himself bore witness to it, and had used the remarkable words, "I think it is the influence of the man himself."

Looking out of the window at this point, Gerard's eye fell upon the figure of Madame Mirabel, approaching from a distance. Mirabel still slept. The time for departure had come, and, noiselessly leaving the room, Gerard went downstairs, let himself out at the front door, and started briskly off to meet the lady. Apparently lost in thought, she did not see him till he was close upon her. Then she glanced up in surprise.

"I saw you coming back, from the window," he said, as he came up. "The doctor's asleep."

"Asleep?" she echoed, quickly. "What made him go to sleep, I wonder?"

"He seemed a little tired, I think," replied Gerard, "and he dropped off quite comfort-

able about a quarter of an hour ago. Of course I didn't leave him till I saw you coming."

"How did he strike you?" enquired Madame Mirabel, with a side-glance.

"He seems to me considerably better," said Gerard. "It may be my fancy—but I thought his complexion looked healthier, and he scarcely coughed at all."

"I told you he was pretty well to-day," said Madame Mirabel, slackening her pace. "I suppose you found him in as good spirits as usual?"

"I saw an improvement there too," replied Gerard. "He was quite cheerful, without any of that feverish gaiety I noticed in him formerly. He's sleeping beautifully now. He told me he thought it was Dr. Lancaster who had done him good. He says he has no end of confidence in him."

"Ah! I shouldn't wonder," said Madame Mirabel, briefly.

Gerard glanced at her as she walked

beside him, and was struck by her preoccupied expression. She looked like a person trying to solve some perplexing enigma. At last she said,—

"Do you know Dr. Lancaster? I forget."

"Only very slightly," he replied. "But I shall no doubt see more of him in future."

"Do," she said, with a certain incisiveness in her voice. "Cultivate his acquaintance. Talk to him."

"There is no reason why I should not," answered Gerard, mildly surprised. "He rather interests me."

"I should like to know his real opinion of my husband," said Madame Mirabel, as though with an effort. "Do you seriously think he's doing him any good?"

"It appears so," said Gerard. "I will certainly talk to him. No doubt you are anxious to know what his opinion is. But I should think he is far likelier to be open with you than with me."

"There's no knowing," replied Madame

Mirabel. "Gaston is better—what has he done to him? I know he hasn't altered the treatment in any way. Of course I am anxious to learn all I can. He may say more to you—but one can't tell. You will do what I ask, won't you?"

She turned upon him another of those penetrating flashes of her blue eyes that had so strange a power. Gerard's heart seemed to give a great leap. "You know there is nothing that I would not do for you," he said, in a fervent undertone. "I am entirely at your disposal—now and always."

She gave him her hand in silence. And as he walked home that evening, he was conscious of a sensation within his breast which puzzled him very sorely—a sensation to which, up till that fateful hour, he had been a total stranger.

CHAPTER VI.

A FLUTTER IN THE DOVE-COT.

JUST about this time, it occurred to Mrs. Palliser that, the weather being so warm and seasonable, she might fitly invite a few friends to drink tea with her in her pretty garden; and cards were accordingly issued to that effect. Privately, however, the good lady warned them that it was not to be a garden-party, properly so called. It was not Mrs. Palliser's way to give pretentious entertainments. What she enjoyed was getting a few friendly acquaintances round her for a confidential chat; for the good lady's confidences were apt to be of a somewhat open and expansive

nature, and the more people she entrusted with her innocent secrets and reflections the happier she felt. And just then she longed to relieve her mind of many things that were pressing on it in regard to the Mirabels. She did not dare, of course, to send Madame Mirabel a card; the serious condition of the lady's husband alone rendered that unnecessary; besides, it was clear that if Madame Mirabel herself were present she could scarcely be made the subject of general conversation. The Chatterings were of course included, Mrs. Palliser deeming it no more than her duty to give Gerard every possible opportunity of furthering his acquaintance with dear Rosie.

Mrs. Palliser was a passed-mistress in all matters pertaining to domestic elegances. Her rooms were always prettily arranged, being tastefully adorned with such hangings, fittings, curios and the like as contributed to the best effect without giving them the appearance of a broker's shop. Her

husband, too, had a pretty taste in Sheraton and Chippendale furniture, in which he invested very effectively from time to time; while Mrs. Palliser was particularly fastidious about her crockery-ware, and vowed she could not drink out of anything but the very thinnest and most delicate china. The same nicety of appointment, as might be expected, prevailed in the garden; nowhere were there trimmer flower-beds, more velvety lawns, better-kept shrubberies, or more brilliant flowers than Mrs. Palliser could boast. All things considered, then, she was in an usually complacent frame of mind as she sat under her spreading cedar-tree one sunny afternoon, awaiting the arrival of her guests. Very handsome and graceful did the elderly lady look in her lace cap with a bright riband here and there, and delicate ruffles of the same material at her throat and wrists; very much in keeping with the scene around her—bright with the brightness of maturity, like her own garden—and

happy in the consciousness that not one of her friends could display so daintily elegant a tea-table as she had now before her.

The first to arrive, by no means to her regret, were the rector and his wife. The Rev. Theophilus Grant was a rather tall, fattish man, with a double chin, and eyes that yearned at everybody in a clerically-affectionate sort of way which many of the ladies thought very sweet. His wife was an energetic, large-boned woman with smooth black hair and a decided look about the lower jaw; great at mothers'-meetings, village concerts, bazaars, and school-treats; excellent in her own walk in life, and not too domineering over her husband. They were a well-matched pair upon the whole, and Mrs. Palliser was very fond of them.

"How do you do, Mrs. Palliser?" said the rector's wife, advancing swiftly towards her hostess. "Such a charming afternoon—your garden looks perfectly lovely. Quite

the prettiest garden in the place, I always say."

"How do you *do?*" chimed in the rector in his most unctuous tones, with his head insinuatingly on one side. "So *glad* to see you, I'm sure."

"Hasn't it turned out a fine day?" said Mrs. Palliser, when the reverend couple were safely seated near her. "My husband will be here directly. I hope you don't find the sun too hot, dear Mrs. Grant?"

"Oh, not at all," replied Mrs. Grant, with the air of one who considered herself quite independent of the weather. "I like the heat; it seems to give me new life. Why, we're the first arrivals! I hope we haven't come too soon?"

"My dear Mrs. Grant!" exclaimed the hostess, indignantly.

"I hope that Mr. Palliser is quite well, —and Mr. Gerard," remarked the rector anxiously.

"Oh, quite, thank you," said Mrs. Palliser.

"And how did your treat go off last Wednesday—it *was* last Wednesday, wasn't it? I was so sorry I couldn't be there."

"Yes, indeed, we missed you terribly," said the rector's wife, with more politeness than sincerity; for Mrs. Palliser had never honoured a school-treat with her presence in her life. "Oh, it was a great success; that is, if one may judge by the amount of buns the children ate. How they can digest such food is a perfect mystery to me; I'd as soon stuff myself with pincushions, I declare. However, it doesn't seem to have done them any harm. Then, you know, we had games, and races, and Theophilus had to be umpire; but of course he knew nothing of the rules, and some of his decisions were—But dear me, who in the world is this?"

Mrs. Palliser, relieved at the interruption, for she took no manner of interest in school-treats and was beginning to feel slightly bored, turned her head in the direction indicated.

"It looks like an old witch," remarked the rector, tittering.

"Why, it's old Mrs. Palliser, I declare!" exclaimed the hostess, as that venerable lady was seen approaching at a short distance. The rector blushed; but the extraordinary appearance of the new-comer certainly afforded some excuse for his hasty expression. She was wearing a rather short and very skimpy dress, while on her head reposed an enormous cotton sun-bonnet, which entirely hid her face, and so far made up in usefulness for what it lacked in beauty. Mrs. Palliser looked absolutely horrified; but the visitors, as in duty bound, rose from their seats, and hastened to pay their respects. The old lady, apparently quite unconscious of the strange figure she presented, received them with curtseys of the utmost dignity, and loftily declined the rector's arm.

"I need the support of no man, Sir, as yet," she said, with tremendous stateliness;

"I trust to my own good stick." But she graciously suffered herself to be escorted to an easy chair, and took her seat upon it with the air of a duchess-dowager, at the very least.

Poor Mrs. Palliser, for a few moments, looked the picture of distress. The bright lawn, the pretty flower-beds, the exquisite tea-service with its dainty porcelain and gleaming silver, her own tasteful, well-appointed dress—all, all was ruined by that awful bonnet. No fairer scene, surely, was ever spoilt by so hideous, so ridiculous a blemish. Even the rector and his wife, though of course they were too polite to smile, were evidently alive to the absurdity, and the poor lady's mortification was extreme. A somewhat embarrassed silence fell upon the group; no one could think of an appropriate remark, and the situation grew somewhat strained.

"Is this a party?" suddenly asked the old lady, breaking the spell.

The abruptness of the question only disconcerted Mrs. Palliser the more.

"Well, mother," she said, with a sub-acid smile, "I don't know what you call a party, exactly. Don't you remember my telling you that I had asked a few friends in to tea?"

"Never heard of it till this moment, my dear," replied the old lady, with prompt decision. "You must have dreamt you told me. Not," she added, turning with a most gracious air to the visitors, "that I have the slightest objection. On the contrary, I am proud to welcome both of you."

Mr. Grant murmured something incoherent with his usual ingratiating smile, in which the words "*so* glad" were partly audible. His wife laughed frankly, and said that they were very pleased to be there.

"My dear mother, do you think you'll require that sun-bonnet *all* the afternoon?" said Mrs. Palliser, desperately. The other

guests might come any moment now, and she felt she could risk almost anything on the chance of getting rid of it before further arrivals took place.

"I'm sure I can't tell, my dear," replied the old lady, placidly, as she arranged her mittens.

Mrs. Palliser cast a glance of despair at the rector's wife, who made no secret of her amusement. The rector, who plumed himself upon his social diplomacy, thereupon offered the old lady a sunshade, and got promptly snubbed for his pains.

"You don't offer your friends any tea, my dear," was her next remark. "I should like a cup myself too, I think."

"I am only waiting for a few more arrivals," said Mrs. Palliser, with a brave attempt at sprightliness; "you shall soon have your tea, mother. The tea-pot will be here directly, and there are some of your favourite cakes, you know." The good lady was determined that her arrangements should

not be interfered with, and the grievance of that sun-bonnet had made her bold.

Happily, at this juncture several more guests arrived, and the shade of the great cedar-tree was soon pretty fully occupied. Mrs. Chattering and Rosie, the former gushing and eager, the latter all sweetness and propriety, were much *en évidence;* both were among the rector's choicest favourites, and nothing could exceed the affectionate devotion of his greeting. Mrs. Fullerton, a very wealthy widow with a person as ample as her means, then came rustling up to Mrs. Palliser with a condescending air, assuring her in the most affable manner of the delight she experienced, etcetera, and so on, and so forth; then turned effusively to the old lady, and complimented her upon the unusual vigour of her constitution.

"You're a perfect wonder, Mrs. Palliser, that you are," she exclaimed; "we younger folk may positively envy you. On such a

sultry day, too; I haven't known the sun so hot I don't know when."

"Madam," replied the old lady, who was not accustomed to this tone of patronage, "we are all of us thrown into the shade when you are present."

Then Mrs. Fullerton, whose bulk was a sore point, sank abruptly into a seat, and plunged into conversation with Miss Tabor, a submissive-looking spinster in spectacles. Several other guests arrived, all of whom were received by the old lady in her astounding bonnet with the most queenly airs; for somehow it seemed to have got into her head that the party was primarily and especially her own affair, and she had a courtly word for every one. Those whom she remembered she addressed by name, though occasionally by the wrong name; while in the case of one or two whom she had never seen before, she vowed she would have known them anywhere.

"We're all here now, I think, except

Dr. Lancaster," observed Mrs. Palliser the younger, dispensing the tea and cakes. She was becoming rather amused by the unexpected airs assumed by the old lady, and laughingly whispered to her next neighbour that it was evident that she herself was deposed for the afternoon.

"Oh! so Dr. Lancaster is coming, is he?" remarked Mrs. Fullerton, in a deep, manly voice.

"He promised to drop in if he could," replied Mrs. Palliser, motioning the servants to hand round the strawberries and cream. "He's such a charming man; don't you think so? He was calling here the other day, and I liked him very much. Ah! here come my husband and Gerard."

The two were seen advancing over the lawn, and a little stir took place among the guests on their approach.

"Don't move, good people, don't move," said Mr. Palliser, in his genial, hearty way, as he shook hands and welcomed everybody.

"Well, rector, it's fine harvest weather, isn't it? Ah, Rosie! You're always at your best, isn't she, Mrs. Chattering?" Then his eye fell upon the extraordinary headgear of his mother. He stopped, and glared with an expression of bewilderment all around. "My word!" he exclaimed, under his breath; and a suppressed titter, audible to everybody but the object of it, pervaded the entire group.

"Never mind, Marmaduke; don't take any notice," said his wife hastily, in an undertone. "Have a cup of tea. Gerard dear, some tea? Just hand those cakes to Mrs. Fullerton, there's a dear boy. Mrs. Chattering, do take some sugar with your strawberries, it brings out so much more flavour. I suppose you have met Dr. Lancaster by this time, Mr. Grant?"

"Oh yes," replied the rector. "He seems a very—er—goodnatured sort of man."

"You met him first at Madame Mirabel's, I think," said Mrs. Chattering, turning to

her hostess. "Of course; I remember what we were saying, you know, when I met you that afternoon, about him and the Mirabels knowing each other so well."

"What *you* were saying you mean, my dear Mrs. Chattering," corrected Mrs. Palliser, smiling. "I know nothing at all about it."

"He's a very close man," said Mrs. Fullerton, helping herself to a substantial wedge of cake. "I've such a very open, candid nature myself that I always distrust those reserved people. I can't get on with them. Why should they make a secret about themselves? I never make any secret about *my*self! But then, indeed, there's no reason why I should, which of course mayn't be the case with everybody."

"Ah," assented Mrs. Chattering. "That's what *I* say. And it's the same thing precisely with the Mirabels. I can't tell you how good of you I thought it was, to go and see Madame Mirabel that day, now she's in such trouble about her husband. I don't

really think I could have made the effort; in fact I haven't the time, what with all my poor people to look after—and they do take such a deal of looking after, you know—nor the strength either. One must take care of one's self you know, if one wants to do any good, and really, now, in the case of the Mirabels, who come from nobody knows where, and have never shown themselves in the least sociable—I suppose you don't know them, do you, Mr. Grant?"

"Er—no," replied Mr. Grant, shaking his head. "The fact is I never call upon any new-comers before they appear in church; and hitherto"—

"Exactly," interrupted Mrs. Chattering. "A most excellent rule; most excellent. Of course, if people don't go to church it shows they don't belong to *us;* and one must draw the line somewhere, or there's no knowing where we should all find ourselves. Why, there have been cases where people who have been received in society, and no

questions asked, have turned out the most dreadful characters; why, there was one person not so very long ago,—no, two persons, a mother and daughter—going out to India, you know, and positively courted by everybody on board because they sang and played so well, and what do you think they were? Actually, the mother kept a *café chantant* in Pondicherry! And I believe there was one young man, of very high family indeed, who was on the point of proposing, positively proposing, to the girl; you know what these Frenchwomen are like,—with their airs and their graces and their *savoir faire* they might take in anybody; so that really I quite shudder when I think what risks one runs, and it makes me ever so careful. Now *you*'ve seen the world, haven't you, Mr. Palliser; and don't you think I'm right?"

"My dear lady," replied that magnate with his most portentous air, "I think that in all such matters every woman of the world

should be a law unto herself. As you say, I've seen a good deal of the world in my time, and I fancy I know most sides of human nature pretty well. I have studied it in camps and in cities, in council-chambers, in the hunting-field, in the castles of the aristocracy, in drawing-rooms and—er—when I was a young man—er—even in green-rooms; I have courted and I have been courted; I have been brought into contact with men and women of all ranks and conditions in life; and as far as my own observations go"—

"Gerard, dear, I wish you'd give Rosie some more strawberries," whispered Mrs. Palliser under cover of her husband's words. "And then go and sit by her, can't you, you provoking boy? The poor child's been left to herself all the afternoon."

The youth stirred himself somewhat slowly in obedience to his mother's behest, heaping a plate with strawberries, cakes, cream, and thin bread-and-butter in the most reckless

style. Rosie received it with her usual unsuspecting innocence, and thought that Gerard was being very kind to her. Mr. Palliser meanwhile continued his prolation with great enjoyment, dwelling upon his many wonderful experiences in the past to the delight and amazement of his guests; a subdued chatter rose upon all sides, accompanied by the chink of cups and spoons, when, suddenly, an inarticulate exclamation from Mrs. Palliser attracted the general attention. The poor lady had sunk back in her chair, and was gazing with a look of horrified distress at a card which one of the servants had just handed to her.

"What's the matter?" demanded her husband, making himself the spokesman of the assembly.

"It's Madame Mirabel!" answered Mrs. Palliser, faintly. Then, recovering herself—"She has come to return my call. How strange that she should have happened to choose this afternoon!"

"Well, my dear, I call it very fortunate," said Mr. Palliser. "I'd better go and bring her back with me. Where have you left the lady, Jane?"

But Gerard was already half way to the house; forgetful of poor Rosie and her strawberries, forgetful of everything but the fact that this beautiful woman was actually under his very roof, and would have to be courteously treated in the presence of all her enemies. Two minutes afterwards he was seen returning across the lawn with her, and a subdued rustle of excitement passed through the throng of ladies as they gazed upon the new arrival. Then Mr. and Mrs. Palliser advanced to meet her, and offered her a courteous welcome.

There was no doubt that she was looking her very best, and the cold, proud, distant air she wore certainly sat well upon her. The elderly ladies received her with at least equal reserve; but one or two of the younger ones rather admired her, while old Mrs.

Palliser greeted her with the stateliest cordiality, and said she remembered her distinctly. For a moment Madame Mirabel stared at her in frank bewilderment, but on understanding who she was responded to the old lady's welcome very civilly.

Mrs. Palliser soon made up her mind to make the best of an unfortunate *contretemps*, and, when she realised the stony reception her new guest had met with from the other ladies, determined to befriend her. In this resolve she was ably seconded by her husband, who rather admired Madame Mirabel, and plumed himself upon his courtier-like demeanour towards the fair sex. He secured her a comfortable chair between himself and his wife, opened a chatty conversation in which he took care that she should participate, and treated her in his very finest style of paternal courtesy. Gerard took a seat at a little distance, quite oblivious of poor Rosie and her prior claims, and watched with considerable interest the

benevolent attentions paid by his parents to the "poor young woman," as Mrs. Palliser now called her in her heart. But it soon became evident to all that the poor young woman was perfectly well able to take care of herself. She showed not the slightest embarrassment as she sat there in her bright, hard beauty, with her tea-cup in her hand, exposed to the full gaze of those curious and unfriendly eyes. Her own eyes, blue and vivid, sparkled with a sarcastic sense of the humour of the situation, and she accepted the civilities of her entertainers with the completest indifference and *sang-froid.*

The conversation, after a brief period of discursiveness, turned on modern literature. Of this Mr. Palliser's knowledge was extremely superficial; but he had plenty to say, and Madame Mirabel soon found herself listening with some amusement to the good gentleman's fluent utterances. The others listened too, but not so critically, and at last Mrs. Fullerton, who was not accustomed to

finding herself in the background upon such occasions, thought the time had come to remind the company of the fact.

"You seem fond of literature," she said in her deep voice, bending her black brows on Madame Mirabel. "Well, I've no objection to literature myself—none in the world, so long as it's judiciously chosen. In fact, I've been a great reader in my day, and I've marked out courses of reading for several young women of my acquaintance. There's Paley's 'Evidences,' for instance, and Young's 'Night Thoughts'—excellent books, which I dare say you may have heard of. Perhaps you've read them. And I don't know that I object even to novels, so long as they've a good moral tendency. I remember how delighted I was with 'Thaddeus of Warsaw' when I was rather younger than I am now. Miss Yonge, too; I suppose you've read 'The Heir of Redclyffe'? Then I dare say you've heard of Miss Martineau; well, her 'Deerbrook' I can thoroughly recommend,

though I shouldn't advise any young person to read her later works—ah, she got very different as she grew older, very different indeed."

"I believe I remember reading 'Deerbrook,' when I was a child," replied Madame Mirabel, demurely, "and somebody gave me 'The Heir of Redclyffe' for a birthday present when I was ten years old."

Mrs. Fullerton felt rather snubbed, and one or two of the ladies smiled. Madame Mirabel continued,—

"I am glad you have so pronounced a taste for novels with a tendency. What is your opinion of Tolstoi?"

"Who?" asked Mrs. Fullerton.

"Tolstoi," replied Madame Mirabel, politely. "Of course you've read 'The Kreutzer Sonata'?"

"I don't read German," said Mrs. Fullerton, rather shortly.

"Tolstoi is a Russian," said Madame Mirabel with a mischievous look in her eyes.

"No doubt you have read him in English. I only mentioned him because he is representative of a type—the interpreter in Russia of that realistic movement which has produced what is called Ibsenism in Norway and the *décadent* school in France; all widely different, of course, and yet all embodying the same protest against the obsolete ideals of the past. You should read the Russian novelists; I think they would interest you extremely."

Mrs. Fullerton stared in helpless bewilderment. She would have given worlds to find some way of snubbing this terrible young woman in return, but for the moment she was powerless. At last she muttered something about such works being entirely beyond her reach.

"But you can get them at any railway-station," said Madame Mirabel.

"And pray what is the tendency—er—of the books you refer to?" asked the rector, blandly.

"One that you would consider somewhat revolutionary, I dare say," replied Madame Mirabel, who, having satisfactorily crushed Mrs. Fullerton, was quite ready to tackle Mr. Grant. "At any rate, it might be well for you to read any of them that you came across before adding them to the village library."

"I read a French novel once," acknowledged the rector, "and I found that quite enough. I have never read one since."

"What was it, may I ask?" said Madame Mirabel.

"Well—er—it was called 'Sœur Anne,' by Paul de Kock," replied the rector, hesitatingly.

"Oh, yes," said Madame Mirabel. "A pretty little book in its way, but rather too sentimental. I can't say I care for novels very much myself, except a few of the very best. In fact, it is rather a mistake to read any books of whatever description unless they are the best of their kind."

"But what is your standard of the 'best in literature?" asked the rector, beginning to feel himself in the presence of an enemy.

"The best books are those which deal only with indisputable facts, and give you the greatest number of perfectly new ideas," answered Madame Mirabel.

"H'm-m," muttered the rector, assuming a judical frown. "I'm scarcely—er—prepared to pronounce upon such a definition offhand. What *are* facts? What, in other words, *is* truth? That is the question." Then, willing to show that Madame Mirabel was not the only learned person present—"Besides, the limits you place are too narrow and severe. You remember Juvenal's line—*Simul et jucunda et idonea dicere vitæ.* That takes in all literature not exclusively—er—of a religious nature."

"You mean Horace, don't you?" remarked Madame Mirabel, calmly.

The rector coloured with mortification. It was no use entering the lists with this in-

tellectual amazon, who had such a knack of inflicting humiliation upon everybody rash enough to tackle her. "Ah, Horace—did I say Juvenal?" he said confusedly, as he passed Mrs. Chattering's empty cup. Mrs. Palliser, though not able to follow the conversation very closely, had a pretty clear perception that Madame Mirabel was making havoc among her guests, and was meditating a politic diversion when the arrival of Dr. Lancaster rendered the attempt unnecessary.

"You have come quite opportunely," said Madame Mirabel, as soon as the doctor was seated and greetings had been exchanged. "We are discussing the merits of rival schools in literature, and you are expected to contribute something to the symposium."

"But you musn't include us all, Madame Mirabel," interposed Mrs. Chattering, who had been longing for an opportunity to get in a word. "Most of us have been listeners, I think. We can't all talk Latin and read

Russian storybooks, though I'm very fond of certain French authors, you know—Oh, yes, I don't at all object to foreign literature as some people might, but I make it a rule never to read a French book that hasn't been recommended to me by somebody whose judgment I can trust. By the way, Rosie, what was that book you got for me the other day—why, it was *you* that recommended it, Mr. Gerard—of course, I remember now; Rabble something—I've such an infamous memory for names; written by a French clergyman, you know; but all I can say is that if you call that French, it's different from my notion of French, for I couldn't make out a line of it, what with words I'd never seen before, and the most disgraceful spelling I ever met with in my life."

"I day say Madame Mirabel could tell you all about it," remarked Mrs. Fullerton, drily; "her memory seems as good as her knowledge of literature is extensive."

"Really, Mrs. Fullerton," protested Madame Mirabel, "you mustn't pay me so extravagant a compliment simply because I happen to have read 'Deerbrook' and 'The Heir of Redclyffe.' They are such favourite books, you know, especially the latter. Every child must have read it, I should think."

Mrs. Fullerton had it on her lips to retort, "I am glad to hear that you have ever read anything so respectable," but had prudence enough to keep it in.

"Do you find much time for reading?" asked Dr. Lancaster, turning to the rector.

Mr. Grant pursed up his lips and shook his head. "Very little indeed," he said; "the cares of a scattered parish like this, you know—I did all my reading when I was a young man."

"Still, it is well to keep abreast with modern thought," remarked the doctor. "I suppose there have never been fifty years in the world's history so rich in intellectual

activity and its results as the latter half of the present century. You see it in all directions—scientific, philosophical, and theological, as well as in *belles lettres.* Thought is now, almost for the first time in Europe, absolutely free from shackles, and she is making a noble use of her liberty."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, shaking her head doubtfully. "I'm afraid that free-thought is a rather dangerous sort of liberty for most people."

"Only because they are not quite accustomed to it," said the doctor, smiling. "But take my own profession; what does it not owe to free thought? At one time the practice of medicine was entirely empirical, and really I think Molière was about right when he made the doctors angry at the recovery of a patient who ought to have died under the orthodox treatment. Well, what was once a system of respectable quackery is now fast becoming one of the most progressive sciences in the world; and that is

owing to free thought, to untrammelled investigation,—nothing else."

"Which reminds me," suddenly cried Mrs. Chattering, "about those medicine-bottles. Dr. Lancaster, I do so wish you'd speak to some of the cottagers about here. You know I do a little simple dispensing myself in a small way, and for months I've been doctoring some of the old women for their rheumatism and one thing and another, and now, doctor, do you know the ungrateful old creatures evade taking my medicine in every possible way, even going so far as to throw the very bottles out of the windows. I do call it so wasteful and so ungrateful of them, and I thought I'd speak to you about it, because you of all men must know how important it is that they should take the stuff that's given them by those who know more about their requirements than they do themselves."

"My dear madam," replied Dr. Lancaster, "I think it only right you should know that

the cottagers are not guilty of the offence that you impute to them."

"Not guilty!" cried Mrs. Chattering. "But I tell you I've seen it myself. Who did it, then, if they didn't?"

"I did," said the doctor. "The confession you have forced from me is a painful one, no doubt; but it has to be made. I, and I alone, am the guilty person."

Mrs. Chattering was struck dumb with astonishment and indignation at this frank avowal. Mrs. Fullerton stared, and, putting up her double eye-glass, waited for the inevitable explosion. Mrs. Palliser looked uneasy, and wished that Dr. Lancaster had been a little more diplomatic.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Chattering, when she found utterance. "Of course, if I had known that, I should never have appealed to you at all. May I ask *why* you—why you—er"—

"My dear lady," said Dr. Lancaster, very suavely, "had *I* known that it was you who

were my benevolent rival, I should have acted differently. But this is the first time I have had the honour of meeting you. The fact is, that when a patient is subjected to two different courses of treatment at the same time, the result is likely to be somewhat prejudicial to the patient; the effect aimed at by one of the practitioners does not come off, and complications may not improbably ensue which will baffle the skill of either. I would not for a moment impugn *your* skill, far less your benevolence; and you can always retaliate by throwing my bottles out of the window if you like, you know. But I think—quite apart from any professional feeling—that it would be wiser to let me have a chance, and see whether such skill as I possess may not help to further your own benevolence, of which you have given such very sterling proofs according to what I am told on every side."

Mrs. Palliser began to breathe again, and thought that really the doctor had got out

of it rather well. Mrs. Chattering looked a little doubtful for a moment, and then her face began to clear. She was just about to reply when Mrs. Fullerton struck in.

"May I ask, Dr. Lancaster, whether you're a believer in the efficacy of drugs?" she said, abruptly.

"Drugs?" replied the doctor, rather surprised. "In certain cases, of course; not in all. The fewer drugs we use the better; but it is impossible to dispense with them altogether. We require their assistance to neutralize poisons formed within the diseased organism—to act as antidotes, in fact. Diseased processes are now regarded as modified physiological processes, the pathological being as truly natural as the physiological; and the aim of treatment is, not to attack disease as an enemy, but to remove the conditions which have led to the change from normal to abnormal working. We employ drugs to assist natural processes, that is all; the tendency of nature is always

recuperative, and prophylactics are ancillary in their operations merely."

Mrs. Fullerton looked puzzled, and wished she had not spoken.

"I confess," continued Dr. Lancaster after a pause, "that I hold views respecting the future of medicine which some persons might consider visionary. Just as, according to Herbert Spencer, the ultimate aim of Government should be to render the institution itself unnecessary, so, I believe, the development of medical science will have an analogous result. The earliest phases of the healing art were utterly unscientific. They were the veriest hocus-pocus—on a level with fetichism, if not below it. Then we had the quackeries in vogue in the Middle Ages, when bleeding was considered almost a panacea, and fever-patients were shut up in rooms from which every breath of fresh air was rigorously excluded, and prophylactic virtues were supposed to lurk in the skins of frogs, rats' livers, and—in cases of

scrofula—the hands of a reigning king. The last superstition was in existence as late as the reign of George the First. At present empiricism still lingers, but then we recognise it as such; and it is dying rapidly. The time is approaching, I believe, when drugs will be a thing of the past. Prevention will take the place of cure. Medical science will move forward in two parallel lines—one tending to modify the virulence of maladies themselves, the other changing altogether the treatment of the maladies thus enfeebled, substituting for the use of pills and potions the inherent forces of nature, whatever they may be called, which make for the recuperation of the tissue—magnetism, electricity, molecular energy, the power of the very mind itself."

"That sounds all very wonderful," exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, admiringly. "We certainly do live in most extraordinary times, don't we, Mrs. Chattering? Really I feel quite afraid, sometimes, lest we should be

meddling with things we were never meant to, you know. But it's very wonderful, very —there's no doubt about that."

"It all seems to me rather impious," remarked Mrs. Chattering, coldly. "What do you think about it, Mr. Grant?"

"H'm-m," murmured the rector, very judicially. "I doubt whether we shall ever see a time when sickness will be stamped out. Sickness, we must remember, is the divinely appointed consequence of sin; and till we are all sinless we can scarcely look for the end of physical suffering. Certainly we have no Scriptural ground to go upon there. And then with regard to the remedies of the future,—well, much may be done, no doubt, by the advance of science, and improvements in sanitation, and so on; but when it comes to will-power, and vital energy, and such things as that, why it almost seems to me as though we should be arrogating the attributes of God Himself, who alone has the power of arresting the course of sickness by a word."

"Dear me! I never thought of that," said Mrs. Palliser, much distressed.

"I believe the only remedy sanctioned in Scripture is rubbing the patient with oil, isn't it?" asked Madame Mirabel, speaking to the rector. "I think, if I remember rightly, doctors are altogether ignored, and the parish clergyman has to be sent for to perform the required operation. May I ask whether it has always proved efficacious, in your experience?"

"I wonder what St. Luke can have thought of that injunction," remarked the doctor. "If I had been in his place I should have taken it as a decided slight."

"The ceremony you refer to," said the rector, after a preliminary clearing of his throat, "is not one which the Church has ever regarded as binding upon her. The conditions under which we live are—er—somewhat different from those in St. James's day. The Divine blessing is now vouchsafed to such—er—recognised remedies as

are administered by duly qualified practitioners. And I am decidedly of opinion that the use of such mysterious powers as Dr. Lancaster has hinted at would involve a sin of presumption. It is not given to man to meddle with things that are above his sphere. Indeed, it appears to me that any attempt of the sort is of the essence of witchcraft, which we find so strongly denounced in Holy Writ."

"In other words," said Madame Mirabel, "the Almighty has no objection to patronise Turkey rhubarb or a quinine pill, but draws the line at all higher developments of pathological science as an infringement of the Divine prerogative?"

Poor Mr. Grant looked terribly shocked at this, and scarcely knew what to reply. Mr. Palliser chuckled, and shook his head doubtfully; Mrs. Palliser ejaculated, "O my dear Madame Mirabel!" under her breath, and most of the other ladies put on very frosty airs. That they were rather shocked

at what they considered Madame Mirabel's profanity was true enough, though they by no means shared the rector's distrust of Dr. Lancaster's views, considering them, indeed, rather attractive than otherwise; but what offended them most was the lady's coolness and independence, and the calm way in which she showed her mental superiority. It was unfeminine, to say the least of it; and, truth to tell, there was just a dash of questionable taste in Madame Mirabel, as might be seen in her heavily befeathered hat, which contrasted so strangely with the modish severity of her dress generally. Meanwhile the main channel of conversation broke up into small separate rills, which flowed smoothly on without encountering any more quicksands or sunken reefs; and soon a movement was made for dispersal, rather, it must be confessed, to the satisfaction of the hostess. The poor lady's anticipations had been upset in several particulars, and she experienced a certain vague sense

of disappointment as she bade her guests farewell; still, there could be no doubt that her little party would have been less lively if the disturbing element had not been introduced, and the ladies would now have something to talk about when they got home. If only Gerard had performed his duty rather better! But he had been utterly neglectful of that poor, dear child, and seemed to have eyes and ears for nobody but that dreadful woman. Then the old lady, who had fallen asleep quite early in the afternoon, woke up; looked vaguely about her, settled her sunbonnet (which had fallen awry) under the impression, apparently, that it was a nightcap, and finally crowned the achievements of the day by addressing Madame Mirabel, in a most dignified adieu, as Mrs. Lancaster.

Gerard, of course, had made up his mind to see the lady home. She out-manœuvred him, however, giving him to understand that the doctor was to be her escort; a rather

bitter pill for Gerard, and but slightly sweetened by her remark that no doubt they would meet on the morrow. The fact was, she had something to say to Dr. Lancaster, and he, on his side, had something to say to her.

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER THE PARTY.

JUST as life would be fairly endurable were it not for its pleasures, so would society be much happier if only its members could contrive to rub along without everlastingly falling in love. It is all nonsense to say we owe the evils which afflict us to an act of *gourmandise*, or disobedience, or curiosity—whichever element may have constituted the sin of it—on the part of the primeval woman. The fatal moment was when Adam fell in love with Eve. Of course, the apple about which we hear so much may have been a love-apple—nothing more likely; something of the same nature, I mean, as the mandrakes

of Leah, and unfortunately as efficacious; but that is not the point. It matters not how the disaster was brought about. Eve exercised her arts of fascination; Adam succumbed without a struggle; and ever since that most direful and pregnant event the tragedy of it has been repeated a thousand million times. And the men can't help it. They can no more help it, apparently, than the descendant of a hundred dipsomaniacs can continue a teetotaller. The cant of a woman's hat, the bow on a woman's shoe, the oscillation of a woman's dress-improver, the leer of a woman's eye, seem to drive some men mad. And for countless ages every woman has honestly imagined her sex to be the one irresistible thing in nature; the most powerful, the most beautiful, the most angelic. Why should she not? She has been told so through all the centuries; poets, philosophers, novelists, dramatists, negro-melodists and music-hall bards all harp upon the well-known theme, all sing

the same worn-out song. It is a strange madness. It is a most noxious whimsy. Hatred has slain its thousands, but love its tens of thousands. No doubt there *are* sweet women in the world—sweet as human beings, not necessarily as women—who are as violets in a field of dandelions; the comforters, the sympathisers, the inspirers and the friends of men. But where these exist they are easily and directly recognisable. They do not prink and preen themselves; their address is simple, straightforward, unself-conscious; they are peace-loving, and divide no friends; they are not given to wearing dress-improvers; and they never leer.

Influenza had not invaded Hampshire at the time of which we are writing, but the other disease is always about; and Gerard had caught it. One knows how a man feels when he is just beginning to sicken for something serious. There is peculiar restlessness, a vague, indefinable *malaise*, a loss of appe-

tite, and an irritability as distressing to the patient as to other people. Gerard experienced something of the same sensations. Always inclined to be taciturn, he now became uniformly silent—sometimes, even, just a little morose ; nervously eager to meet the author of his malady, nervously elated when in her presence, nervously despondent afterwards if her manner to him had not been all that he had hoped or longed for. We need not dwell upon his symptoms. They are nearly always the same in such cases as his, making the sufferer a misery to himself, and more or less of a nuisance to his friends.

Of course his mother had no serious suspicion of all this. Mothers seldom have. The good lady was a little annoyed at Gerard's persistent blindness to the pink charms of Rosie Chattering, and wondered somewhat impatiently that he should be on such sympathetic terms with the Mirabels ; but that there was anything deeper than the most ordinary friendship between them

never entered her innocent head. Mr. Palliser saw plainly enough that Gerard admired the lady; indeed, with his experience of cities, and castles, and courts, he had a practised eye for such infatuations; yet even he had no more notion than his wife of the virulence of his son's distemper. The attack had been incubating for some weeks, during which period the patient himself was scarcely conscious of it, and consequently showed no external indications; now, however, it declared itself in a most unmistakeable manner, and poor Gerard had to bear it and conceal it as best he might.

It was on the afternoon we have just been describing that Gerard awoke to the full realisation of his plight, the enlightening process having been set on foot by jealousy. When Madame Mirabel declined his escort, and went away with Dr. Lancaster, with whom she seemed on such very confidential terms, the pain he experienced was that, and nothing else. He saw in Dr. Lancaster a

rival, and a rather formidable one. Of course he had not the slightest ground for any such suspicion, for not a word had ever passed between Madame Mirabel and the physician which all Hampshire might not have heard; but Gerard was in love, and his mental vision was as much perverted as that of a man with jaundice. He might, indeed, have been considerably edified could he have listened to their conversation.

"I think you must have made a rather favourable impression upon some of those people this afternoon," Madame Mirabel remarked, as they strolled quietly across the heather in the direction of the 'Seven Thorns.'

"Did I talk so much nonsense?" answered Dr. Lancaster, with a grave smile.

Madame Mirabel laughed. "I fancy you succeeded in spite of yourself," she said. "The clergyman was the only one who seemed to me at all ruffled. What a creature! It is simply wonderful to me that any

person who can read and write *can* be so ignorant. I suppose it's the natural result of his system. As for that Mrs. Chattering, I think your victory was complete."

"I hope so, for the sake of my patients," returned the doctor.

"Do you know," said Madame Mirabel after a pause, "that you managed to puzzle *me*, rather, by some of the things you said?"

"Indeed I did not know it," replied Dr. Lancaster, surprised. "What do you refer to?"

"Well," answered Madame Mirabel with a hesitation very unusual to her, "I refer to some of the opinions you expressed about the future of medicine. Am I to understand that you really believe in all the modern jargon about brain-waves, telepathy and the rest of it?"

"I never believe in jargon of any sort," said Dr. Lancaster, quite seriously. "Telepathy and brain-waves are simply expressions which have no more than an *ad interim*

value for certain alleged phenomena which are now undergoing investigation. Until the investigation is complete I do not profess to form a judgment. I can only say that appearances are in favour of the theory that a new and hitherto unknown sphere is being gradually opened up to scientific scrutiny."

"You mean that you are quite prepared to believe in the objectivity of mind, and its influence on material objects," remarked Madame Mirabel. "Well, I am not."

"It would be rather unreasonable to expect a lady who does not acknowledge the existence of the mind to believe in its influence on anything," replied Dr. Lancaster, very drily.

Madame Mirabel waved her hand with a slightly impatient gesture, implying that such a quibble was surely beneath persons of their seriousness and culture. "Remarks of that sort would be more suitably bestowed on Mr. Grant," she said, with a shade of

stiffness. "Tell me frankly what your views are. Take hypnotism, for instance. Has it any scientific basis?"

"It must have," replied the doctor. "I'm not going to be trapped into an adjudication upon its claims, because I don't know enough about it; but my beliefs are strongly in its favour. It has been satisfactorily proved that by it one man can control the thoughts of another, can affect his health, can even change his character. You have only to read the reports drawn up every now and then at Nancy and La Salpétrière to come to the same conclusion. Charcot, Liébeault, and the other practitioners of the art are not quacks; they are men of the very highest scientific character, and the results they have achieved are beyond dispute. But of the exact process, physiologically speaking, by which those results are brought about, I know too little to speak."

Madame Mirabel was silent for a minute or two, revolving what Lancaster had said.

At last she enquired, with some earnestness,—

"And do you suppose that these phenomena are ever produced unconsciously?"

"How do you mean?" said Lancaster. "What—whether one person can hypnotise another without knowing it?"

"Precisely," assented Madame Mirabel.

"Ah, that is a difficult question," replied Lancaster. "I am not aware of any authoritative utterances upon the point. It is, of course, claimed by the telepathists; and if—*if*, I say—it is possible for one person to influence another at a distance unconsciously, I do not see why he should not at close quarters. Many of the alleged cases of telepathy are represented as having been unconsciously, that is without deliberate intention, produced by the agents. Even when there has been a wish, there has often been no conscious or calculated design."

Madame Mirabel looked thoughtful, and for the moment made no reply.

"By the way," resumed the doctor, after a pause, "there's something I want to say to you upon another and rather more important matter. It's about your husband. Haven't you noticed any change in him of late?"

"It has struck me that he seemed stronger," answered Madame Mirabel, glancing up.

"He is so much stronger," said Dr. Lancaster with emphasis, "that I confess myself entirely at a loss to account for it. The improvement is quite extraordinary. When I first took up the case, he was a dying man. At present—well, I don't believe he is. His appetite, his pulse, his complexion, his breathing, all show a marked amelioration. In fact, there seems to have been a steady increase of vitality in him, and if only this can be maintained we may look forward to some years of life for him yet. You see I speak quite frankly to you. I cannot tell to what all this is due; it may come to a stop as causelessly as it has set in; but there is no doubt of his state at present.

He is worlds better than he was the first time I saw him, some six weeks ago."

"Do you mean to say that he is going to recover?" asked Madame Mirabel, in astonishment.

"Certainly not," said the doctor; "the case is altogether too perplexing to justify me in any such prediction. At present he is decidedly gaining ground; that is all I can say with any certitude. My own calculations are temporarily, at any rate, upset. I can only continue to watch him very carefully, and try to discover if possible the source of the enhanced vitality he shows."

"I don't understand it at all," said Madame Mirabel; "it sounds almost incredible. Surely you must have altered the treatment in some way?"

"In no important point whatever," replied Lancaster.

"Of course I have noticed an improvement," resumed Madame Mirabel, "and so

has young Palliser. In fact he has mentioned it to me once or twice, and his observations agreed with mine. But, as you put it, the news is a complete surprise to me."

"Then I am all the more fortunate in being able to bring you such unexpected happiness," replied Lancaster, with a singularly winning smile. "Only don't count too much upon it. I say nothing about the future, and am quite unable to draw any conclusions from the past."

"You are too modest, Dr. Lancaster," said Madame Mirabel, banteringly. "In the Middle Ages you would have been burnt for a magician."

"That is a high compliment," said the doctor. "The race has died out, I am afraid."

"It is only the name that is changed," retorted Madame Mirabel, darting a curious look at him. "At present we call them—hypnotists."

Dr. Lancaster started, and met her gaze in wonderment. "Hypnotists?" he repeated. "I am no hypnotist. Do you really believe that I have been hypnotising your husband?"

Madame Mirabel laughed gaily, and shook her head. "No, I'm not going to commit myself," she said with an approach to playfulness. "I shall take a lesson in caution from you, and decline to 'draw conclusions,' as you phrase it. I don't want to pry into matters too deep or too high for me, as the clergyman would say."

"But seriously"—

"But seriously, Dr. Lancaster, I have nothing more to add," she interrupted, with a gaiety of manner which her companion suspected to be half-assumed. "I believe everything you tell me, and nothing more; will not that appease you?"

"I am sure you have the fullest faith in me," said Lancaster, half-tentatively, with a grave smile.

"In whom should I have faith, if not in you!" she exclaimed with sudden passion. Then, in a calmer tone, "Of course you understand me. You have studied these subjects; I have not. I was only jesting just now. You seemed so entirely at a loss to account for Gaston's improvement that it occurred to me to start a conjecture on my own account."

The doctor laughed, and made an indifferent reply. They were getting near their destination now, but the afternoon was so bright and genial and the moorland air so invigorating that neither felt anxious to go in. Lancaster offered a few desultory remarks as they strolled along, more for the sake of keeping up a show of conversation than for any other reason, to which his companion responded more or less at haphazard. She was not listening to what he said. She was turning over in her own mind certain things that puzzled her, and to which she could get no clue. A solid, undeniable fact

on one side; on the other, scraps of talk, fugitive suggestions, unsupported theories about a subject she had always considered beneath the notice of those scientific blue eyes of hers; and now she was trying to unravel the skein of it all, and see whether she could bring order out of the curious jumble. First there was the great fact of her husband's unmistakeable improvement: an improvement which the physician had distinctly confessed himself unable to account for on scientific grounds. Then there were those scraps of talk. Lancaster had said that cases had been known in which the state of a man's health was affected by the hypnotic or magnetic influence of another. He himself was no hypnotist; repudiated the suggestion with something of indignation, indeed; and yet in the same breath acknowledged the possibility of magnetic influence being exercised *unconsciously*. That gave her pause. Still, all that amounted to nothing. There was not a

shade, not an atom, of proof that any connection existed between the fact on one hand and the theories on the other. She had not then heard the remark that had fallen so carelessly from her husband's lips in his recent conversation with Gerard, but she was to hear it that very evening, and it was bound to deepen the impression already occupying her mind.

They found him in the garden, basking in the warm rays of the westering sun. He looked wonderfully better; a skeleton, of course, and weak, but with new life, new health, shining in his eyes.

"I feel almost strong again," he said, lazily, as he got into bed an hour later. "Lancaster is a wonderful fellow. He does nothing to me, and yet he makes me well. He sits, and he talks, and he looks me in the eye with his br-rave glance, and he holds me by the hand, and I get new strength, somehow. Life is very pleasant after all. Ah! how sleepy I am. Yes, it is very

strange. It seems as though it were the influence of the man himself."

The influence of the man himself. How strangely, how appositely, the words fell upon her ear! A new world of possibilities seemed suddenly to open before her. Up till that day she had known nothing, suspected nothing. She had marked the improvement in Gaston's health, and at first had set it down simply as one of those transient, treacherous gleams of a revival which is impossible that are so characteristic of pulmonary disease. The improvement continued, and then she began to wonder. Still no idea that it might be permanent dawned upon her mind. It was curious, certainly, that the patient should gain so much strength, and it was this that was puzzling her when she spoke to Gerard about it, and asked him—a strange request!—to see if he could get any light from Dr. Lancaster. From this it may be inferred that the doctor had been very reserved in his communica-

tions to Madame Mirabel. It was not till they were walking home together from Mrs. Palliser's that he spoke out, and what he said had taken her utterly by surprise. She knew her husband was better—temporarily better; but that he was actually mending, might even get altogether well and live for years, came like a revelation to her, and it was a difficult matter to conceal the profoundness of her emotion.

The Pallisers had lingered in the garden after the departure of their guests; Gerard, obstinately blind to his mother's signals to him to accompany the Chatterings, smoking one cigarette after another, and the old lady, refreshed by her nap, evincing unusual liveliness. Mrs. Palliser, mildly excited by the events of the afternoon, was only too glad to discuss them with anybody; while Mr. Palliser, always more or less of a saunterer, threw himself back in a comfortable cane chair, enjoying the evening breeze.

"I think it went off very well on the

whole," remarked his wife, complacently. "But I never was more taken aback in my life than when that Madame Mirabel sent in her card. It did seem to me the most unfortunate coincidence! Of course I should never have dreamt of inviting her to meet all those people. You're sure you didn't know she was coming, Gerard?"

"How should I know?" said Gerard, astonished.

"Well, my dear, I can't say, I'm sure," replied his mother rather shortly. "You seem very intimate with them, that's all. But I must say I don't wonder at people not liking her very much. There's such a self-assertiveness about her, and an appearance of wanting to set down everybody else. The way she spoke to the rector, for instance—and that good old Mrs. Fullerton! No, I don't like her, and I'm afraid I never shall."

"Surely you can't blame Madame Mirabel because Mrs. Fullerton and the rector are

ignorant," remarked Gerard, mildly. "I thought she paid them altogether too high a compliment in talking to them as though they were her equals."

"Oh, I don't say she isn't clever," said Mrs. Palliser; "but it's what I call a bad sort of cleverness. I'm sure she's been badly brought up. No woman of really nice feeling would show off as she did this afternoon. I felt sorry for her when she first came, because I thought she was received so coldly; but when I saw how thoroughly self-possessed she was, and how well she knew how to hold her own, well, I didn't pity her any more."

"I rather enjoyed watching her," said Mr. Palliser. "A handsome woman, calmly and without effort discomfiting a host of foes with their own weapons, is, to me, an amusing sight. In fact I think myself that she's a very charming person."

"Oh, Marmaduke!" exclaimed his wife.

"And I think so too," put in the old

lady. "She has a fine air—a fine air, and a fine way with her altogether. It isn't often one sees manners of that sort now-a-days, I think, among the younger people."

"No, indeed, and I'm very glad it isn't," said Mrs. Palliser, sharply. "I like young women to be quiet, and modest, and proper. I've no notion of persons who go flaunting about in that aggressive way, and flying in other people's faces."

"You prefer Rosie Chattering, mother, don't you," remarked Gerard, emitting a fine blue thread of smoke.

"Dear child!" exclaimed the good lady; "yes, indeed I do. A dear, sweet, natural, unsophisticated girl as ever lived. You may say what you like, Gerard, but those are the girls who are a blessing to their mothers and their husbands. Always sweet-tempered, never contradicting their elders, regular at church—ah! don't tell me about your Madame Mirabels. One girl like Rosie Chattering is worth a dozen of them."

"So clever, too — so well read — such sound literary judgment," murmured Gerard, in his very laziest voice.

"My dear," retorted his mother, quite angrily for her, "I've no patience with you. You bring everything to the standard of books, and education, and things of that sort. It's perfectly shocking. Dear Rosie reads quite as much as is good for her, I'm sure; and her mother, no doubt, exercises a wise supervision over *what* she reads. I don't believe in so much reading, for my part; particularly in these days, when so many wicked books are written. Look at Madame Mirabel, again—the books I found upon her table were something perfectly dreadful. No decent person would have had them in the house. But it's always the same with these people who have no religion. They think that cleverness is everything and morality nothing; and that if they only *know* enough, or think they do, nothing more is necessary. I've heard all

about these modern theories that you're so fond of, and how many souls they ruin every year."

"Really?" said Gerard. "I wasn't aware there were any statistics published. Never mind, mother; Madame Mirabel may be rather omnivorous in her reading, but there's a good side to that as well as a bad one, you know. I lent her a very pious book myself, only the other day."

"You?" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser. "I never heard of such a thing since I was born. A pious book! What was it, pray?"

"'Literature and Dogma,' by Matthew Arnold," replied Gerard, innocently.

"Matthew Arnold, indeed!" uttered Mrs. Palliser, mistrustful and disappointed.

"He's acknowledged to be a respectable writer, at any rate," said Gerard.

Mrs. Palliser looked very doubtful, while her husband hummed a tune, and played with his watch-chain smilingly. Then the old lady, who often listened to the conver-

sation around her without appearing to do so, remarked—

"I know that book. I read it several years ago."

"You, grandmother!" exclaimed Gerard, with more animation than he had shown before. "Well, what do you think of it?"

"I think the literature is very good, but the dogma very bad, my dear," said the old lady, folding her hands upon her lap.

"O mother, why didn't you let *me* say that?" cried Mr. Palliser, laughing in serio-comic admiration at his mother's somewhat epigrammatic utterance.

"Never mind, my dear; you'll say it some day, no doubt," replied the old lady, mighty drily.

Gerard sniggered; but his father felt a little aggrieved, thinking that his own generous compliment deserved a better return. Mrs. Palliser fell into a fit of musing, laughing somewhat absently at her husband's discomfiture and patting the ample grey curls on

each side of her temples in a mechanical way that showed her thoughts were wandering. At last Gerard said, rather maliciously—

"Lancaster gave Mrs. Chattering a good setting-down this afternoon."

"Yes—*didn't* he!" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser, with a look of half-shocked amusement. "Poor woman, I *was* so sorry for her. However, I hope she won't bear malice. I must say I thought he got out of the difficulty very well."

"I like Lancaster," remarked her husband. "I thought he was going to prove one of your worthy young men—and I can't bear worthy young men. There's an appearance of strength about him that pleases me, somehow. He's the sort of man who knows his own mind, I should think, and isn't to be put out of his way without knowing the reason why."

"Yes, I dare say," said Mrs. Palliser. "But I do wish he hadn't said all that about

mind-curing, or will-curing, or whatever it was. I'm old-fashioned, and stick to what I've been accustomed to, and all this new talk upsets me. It's just as though people were trying to work miracles again, when the age of miracles is past. It isn't nice, somehow. I always think that a man who goes in for that sort of thing must be a bit of a quack: or if he isn't a quack he's something worse."

"And what do you consider worse than quackery?" asked Gerard, with a grave air.

"Well, my dear," returned his mother in the peremptory tone she often adopted when standing on the defensive, "if you want to know I'll tell you; though you're such a shocking little sceptic I know you'll only laugh at me. I mean witchcraft;—there! I don't like all this prying into mysteries and pretending to these wonderful powers; there's something sinful about it, and I object to the whole thing on principle."

"You must have got all that from Grant,

my dear," said Mr. Palliser, with a twinkle in his eye. "You seemed quite interested in the subject before the Church condemned it by the mouth of the worthy rector this afternoon. That's what I've always said—the world is governed by women, and women are governed by parsons. That's why we're all so virtuous; eh, mother?"

"No doubt, no doubt," replied the old lady briskly. "Your own virtues, at any rate, could scarcely be otherwise accounted for."

"It's all very well to laugh, Marmaduke," said his wife, "but you just mark my words. As sure as you're sitting there, if there *is* anything in these wonders that people talk about, evil will come of it. I believe we shall have a new set of diseases springing up as the result of it all, and then we shall be overrun with quacks professing to cure them, and a pretty state we shall all be in. I've no faith in it whatever, and I shall set my face against it steadfastly."

"There was once a man," observed Gerard, in his preoccupied way, "who objected to the introduction of street lamps in his village on the ground that the lamps would bring policemen and the policemen would bring thieves. Don't you think he was a very shortsighted individual?"

"I don't know what you mean, my dear," retorted his mother, rather sharply.

"Well, is Lancaster doing Mirabel any good?" asked Mr. Palliser.

"Beyond question," replied Gerard. "He has gained a great deal of strength lately, and looks ever so much better than before."

"But he can't recover, Gerard, can he?" exclaimed Mrs. Palliser.

"I can't possibly say," he returned. "I suppose Lancaster has his own opinion about it, but he hasn't confided it to me."

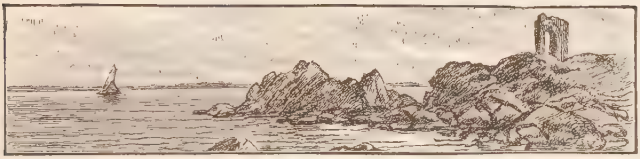
"Ah, I'm afraid there's no hope," said Mrs. Palliser, despairingly. "I wonder whether he's really fond of that wife of his! I can't imagine how he can like her; and in that

case I should think he would almost be glad to die and get away from her. I know *I* should be. But then if he did, you know, she'd probably get hold of somebody else; so perhaps it's better that he should live, after all."

"Even the unexpected doesn't always happen," said Gerard sententiously. "But I dare say if I represent the matter properly to Mirabel he'll see it in the same light, and make his arrangements accordingly."

Mrs. Palliser emitted a shriek of reprobation, and then broke into an uncontrollable fit of laughter. Gerard had preserved a placid front as long as his mother confined herself to uncomplimentary remarks about Madame Mirabel, which, indeed, rather amused him than otherwise; but her last insinuation cut him sharply. Somebody else? Who would that somebody be? Then all that was true and good and loyal in him rose in revolt against such unworthy thoughts, and, with a fervent wish that Mirabel

might live for half a century to come, he strolled back to the house and read 'The Scholar Gipsy' till it was time to dress for dinner.



CHAPTER VIII.

TWO TRIPS TO TOWN.

DURING his early years, while his father was still alive, Mr. Palliser had had a brief and uneventful career as a man of business in the City. At that time he was tolerably energetic, fond of bustle and variety, and by no means deficient in commercial aptitude; though of real judgment and common business shrewdness he never possessed a grain, and the wisest thing he ever did in his life was to sell out as soon as his father died and retire from the City altogether. From the age of eight-and-twenty, therefore, he had been a gentleman at large; but still the City exercised a certain fascination over

him, and there were few things he enjoyed more than a stroll through Lombard Street or down 'the Lane,' surrounded by the cheerful incessant din of City life,—the clerks and the messengers hurrying to and fro, the well-dressed, impetuous brokers rushing hither and thither, the little knots of solid merchants in their bright hats and white linen and black satin scarves chattering at the corners of the street, the rattling hansoms, the lumbering gigantic drays, and the thousand-and-one other features of the great E.C. postal-district. Mr. Palliser moved through the busy streets with the complacent air of a man who could afford to enjoy the excitement and exhilaration of the scene without either pecuniary risk or the constraints incident to personal participation in commercial enterprise; his good father had borne all such burdens for him, years agone; and it was with a smile of more than usual benevolence that Mr. Palliser nodded to this man, waved his hand airily to that, and ex-

changed greetings with a third, thinking all the time how old and worn they had grown since he had last seen them, and wondering whether the City was as pleasant a place to them as it was to him.

Thus it fell out, a few weeks after the events of the last chapter, that Mr. Palliser made an excuse for a trip to Lothbury; the pretext being that he wanted to see his stockbroker. He had heard nothing further about the great company in which he had invested so many hopes—and pounds—and it occurred to him that the advice of a solid business man on whose judgment he could rely might really be worth asking. To most people this very prudent impulse would have come first of all; but Mr. Palliser, as we know, was apt to be precipitate; and now, having parted with his money, he deemed it a remarkably shrewd and business-like thing to consult his stockbroker upon the character and prospects of the investment.

It was therefore in a benignant frame of

mind that the good gentleman crossed Waterloo Bridge one fine sunshiny morning —a morning on which it was difficult to realise the fact that sometimes fogs of impenetrable blackness and insufferable stench pervaded the cheerful streets, that east winds and drenching rain cut one's face like iced razors, and that the pavement was slippery with the foulest slush and grease. Mr. Palliser always avoided London on such days, and seldom saw it except under its brightest and most attractive aspects. He looked particularly bright himself, in a smartly-cut blue coat and well-brushed hat, his curly gray hair ruffled every now and then by the river breeze, and his portly form erect, well-knit, and handsomely proportioned. As he strolled up Wellington Street, he looked in at the shop-windows, with all the interest of a person to whom such exhibitions had the charm of novelty; stopped a minute or two before the office of the *British Pedagogue*, and read the contents-bill of that sagacious

weekly with an indulgent smile ; then turned up the Strand, and so made his way at a leisurely pace along Fleet Street and Cheapside to the Bank. It was now nearly twelve o'clock, and Mr. Palliser calculated that he would have ample time for a friendly chat with the stockbroker before going for a plate of soup to Birch's, as was his custom in the middle of the day when in the City.

"Well, Mr. Palliser, and what's the best news with you ?" enquired the man of business cheerily, as they shook hands. "One doesn't often see you here—lucky man, lucky man. But come, sit down. What is it today—Mexican Rails ? Brighton A's ? Central Argentines ? Money's awfully tight, I must tell you, and things are looking queer. Let me see—you hold some Provincial Cedulas, don't you ? There's a bit of a spurt on just now in South American securities, and if you're a seller now's your time."

Mr. Palliser, comfortably seated in a capa-

cious leather arm-chair, smiled and shook his head knowingly. "Ah, I dare say," he said, with the air of a man accustomed to that sort of solicitation. "We know all about it, don't we? No—I came up to-day just to see if you could get me a little information, Riley, about that new company, you know; that thing that Jerningham's got in hand. When is it going to be floated?"

Mr. Riley's manner changed at once. "Jerningham?" he repeated, with a perplexed frown. "You don't mean that Anti-Intoxicant whatever-he-calls-it, do you?"

"Yes, I do," said Mr. Palliser.

"Floated!" resumed the other. "I don't suppose it will ever be floated. Much more likely to be liquidated, I should think. But why? You don't mean to say you're nibbling at a thing like that, do you?"

"Why not?" exclaimed Mr. Palliser, looking vastly important. "Look at the promoters—they're influential enough, I should say. Men like that don't take up rotten

things. Why, Rothschild himself said there was a fortune in it. I believe they're helping to finance it. A man told me the other day"—

"Pooh, pooh, my dear Sir," interrupted Riley. "Rothschild, indeed—you might as well talk about Rothschild financing Mother What's-her-name's Soothing Syrup, or the latest Universal Pill. As for the promoters, I simply don't believe in 'em. Jerningham tells you this man's on it, and that man, and the other man—just see if he dares to print their names on the prospectus. No, no, Palliser, take my advice and have nothing to do with it. I can put you in for some better things than that."

"H'm," muttered Mr. Palliser, becoming rather grave. "Ah, well—so you don't think much of it, I see. I suppose that in that case it's not likely there'll be much market for the shares. Well, I must think about what's to be done. It's monstrous strange, though. But if the company were once

floated, I suppose there'd be a quotation; and if so"—

"I do believe you're in it already!" exclaimed the old stockbroker, with a threatening look.

"A mere trifle," replied the other, with a guilty air which he strove vainly to conceal. "Nothing to make or mar. Only"—

"Well, you've outdone yourself this time, Palliser," said Mr. Riley throwing himself back in his chair. "How often have I entreated you never to do anything of this sort without my advice? Jerningham, too—to think that an exposed swindler like that can have got round you so easily! It's beyond everything. How much did he get out of you?"

"Get out of me!" echoed Mr. Palliser, rather indignantly. "I took five hundred pounds' worth of the stock. If it turns up trumps, well and good; if not"—

"Ay, if not; what then?" asked the stockbroker, as his client paused. "Have you

any idea what your liability is likely to be?"

Mr. Palliser said no; not the faintest; and very uncomfortable he began to feel. The stockbroker, determined to give him a lesson, pursued his advantage mercilessly.

"No, I dare say you haven't. Why, you're entirely in that man's hands; and if he brings out this precious company of his with your name on the list of original shareholders, it may go rather hard with you. The best advice I can give you is to sell out to the first jobber who gives you a chance. If he doesn't float it after all, of course you'll be safe enough; only you'll have paid five hundred pounds for the advantage, and I think myself it's just a trifle dear at the price, seeing that you had it for nothing at all in the first instance."

Mr. Palliser felt like a schoolboy in disgrace, and was heartily glad that neither his wife, nor his mother, nor his son was there to see him punished. He now began to get

exceedingly uneasy. "Look here, Riley," he said at last, "I dare say I was a trifle precipitate about the business; but there were other considerations that influenced me —I didn't look upon it as an ordinary investment. What do you really know about it? That's the question. If you can give me any trustworthy information on the subject I should really be very grateful to you. Is there no chance of its succeeding, do you think?"

Mr. Riley's face relaxed a little. "Well, Palliser," he said, "I don't know much more about it than what I have told you; but if you want my private opinion—which may be worth nothing at all, mind you—I don't think you'll be ruined this time. Your five hundred pounds you had better look upon as gone. Jerningham will never be able to float the concern at all; that's *my* belief; he's got your hundreds and probably a good many more, and if you ever manage to get any back I shall say you're a particularly

clever man. I may be wrong, of course. The thing may be floated, it may even have a bit of a boom, and then you'll be able to sell your shares; but I have very serious doubts about it myself. Meantime, however, there's nothing to be done but wait."

This was not very reassuring, but it was evident that Mr. Riley was in no mood to give him greater comfort, and Mr. Palliser was fain to be content. But the enormous fortune—the thousands of pounds a year—the eradication of drunkenness from the whole civilised world—the colossal operations — ah, where were all these now? Vanished like the lingering memories of a dream; and five hundred pounds in hard gold had probably vanished with them.

Well, there was no use in fretting after all, and Mr. Palliser, on taking leave of his Mentor, bent his steps in the direction of the Royal Exchange. A plate of soup and a gill of sherry would probably induce brighter views of the share-market, not to

say of life in general; for he was of a cheerful disposition withal, and had been known to extract enjoyment from even more serious troubles than this one. It was pleasanter, of course, to boast of exploits, adventures, and good luck; but there was still a degree of satisfaction to be derived from boasting of crosses and misfortunes, so long as he was the hero of them, and they were of a sufficiently startling nature to make an exciting story; while such a hair's-breadth escape as he was now hoping for was almost as good as either. Accordingly he made a comfortable meal, gave the waiter a liberal tip, and, feeling considerably more cheerful than before, turned up Finch Lane; then he sauntered up and down Lombard Street, watching the busy men as they popped in and out of the great banking-houses; and finally found himself in King William Street. He had just faced in the direction of the statue, and was walking slowly along the pavement, when the swinging-doors of one

of the Life Assurance offices opened, and a lady came quickly out. He was unable to see her features, for she had her veil down, and began to walk in the same direction as himself a few yards in front of him; but there was something strangely familiar to him in her gait and figure. For a moment he was at a loss to know who she was. Then he suddenly remembered, and, in a dozen rapid steps, was by her side.

"Mr. Palliser!" she exclaimed in astonishment. "The very last person I should have expected to meet. You're not a City man, are you?"

"Only now and then, when the humour takes me," replied Mr. Palliser, smiling. "Yet surely it is more curious for you to be here than for me. Are you alone? Can I escort you anywhere—even if it's only over the terrible crossing here?"

"No, indeed, thank you," replied Madame Mirabel, recovering herself. "It is indeed a dreadful crossing—one of the very worst

in London. But I won't take you out of your way. I'm only waiting for an omnibus."

"Let me see you into it, at any rate," urged Mr. Palliser in his most paternal way. "Ah—here's a chance, I think—there are no more vehicles coming just now. We must be quick, though. Look out for that hansom! That was a narrow shave. Why, Madame Mirabel, you're more at home in crushes of this sort than I am myself, I declare. I know very few ladies who could take a crossing in your—what shall I call it? —sportsmanlike style."

"Oh, I never hurry myself," said Madame Mirabel coolly, though she was inwardly fuming at having been overtaken by the good garrulous gentleman. "If once you lose your head and go flying about hither and thither you're sure to be knocked down. However, here we are, and now let me beg of you to go back."

"But why should I, my dear lady?" asked Mr. Palliser. "My time's my own; I really

must insist on seeing you safe into your omnibus, at least. Does it start from here? Where are you going to?"

Madame Mirabel coloured with vexation, and murmured something about the neighbourhood of Stockwell.

"Oh well, we'll soon get an omnibus," remarked Mr. Palliser. "They start just over there. Won't you take my arm? It's safer in a crowd, I think. You've a good way to go before you get back to Haslemere."

"It is rather far," replied Madame Mirabel, with an effort.

"However, the days are pretty long now," continued her escort, who found it as much as he could do to keep pace with her. "I am sorry you'll be so late; I should have been charmed to travel down with you. As it is, I shall catch a rather earlier train, no doubt."

"You shall not go another step out of your way," said Madame Mirabel, suddenly

stopping short. "Thanks ever so much for your assistance, but really I do not need it. Goodbye;" and she held out her hand with so decided a gesture of dismissal that Mr. Palliser felt it impossible to press his company upon her further. He therefore took his leave with a grand sweep of his hat, and politely though very reluctantly turned back; while Madame Mirabel, set free, quickened her steps considerably, and was soon lost amid a throng of omnibuses.

"Now I wonder what that young woman's up to?" soliloquised the good gentleman, as he tramped westward again. "She can scarcely have been insuring her husband's life, I should think. Stockwell, too—whatever can she want to do at Stockwell?"

"An unfortunate meeting and a desperate escape," thought Madame Mirabel, as she stepped into her omnibus; for she was a careful woman, and never spent money on cabs. "I suppose now that that very excellent old person is wondering why I'm

going to Stockwell, and within the next four-and-twenty hours the majority of his neighbours will be wondering why too. The amusing part of it is that they will—*never*—know."

The idea seemed to entertain her, for she smiled a little as she took her seat. The omnibus jolted on again, and then, for want of better idleness, she began observing her fellow-passengers—that never-failing source of interest to the student of human nature. There was the usual stout woman with a big bundle and a red face, who looks suspiciously at everybody else; the pale, shabby girl in a frayed jacket—pathetically respectable, possibly hungry, belonging to that half of the world of whose means of existence the other half is said to be so ignorant; the sharp-looking junior clerk or errand-boy, with a black leather case of papers strapped across his chest and the last new ditty from the music-halls lurking in ambush behind his teeth; the middle-aged lady who sets

the fashion in Balls Bond or Hackney Wick, easily distinguishable by her fine colour, smart bonnet, showy inexpensive 'silk,' and doubtful finger-nails; the spare, meek man, whose corpulent umbrella is so apt to get in other people's way, and whose necktie always will ruck up behind; the woman with two children and a baby, of whom we will not now speak more particularly; the two young female persons who discuss family matters at the top of their voices, and look round every now and then to see what effect they are creating; the goodnatured man, who makes friendly remarks to no one in particular, only to find them received in stony silence: all these types were represented in that Stockwell omnibus, and passed under the keen, contemptuous criticism of Madame Mirabel. How irredeemably vulgar, and tawdry, and commonplace they were; how grotesquely mean; what clumsy workmanship they represented, and what coarse material had been used in the manufacture

of them! And yet with regard to honesty, sobriety, and industry, homely domestic virtues and humdrum worth, as exemplified in a general struggle to pay their way and an unconscious habit of kindness to their children and their neighbours, it is possible that these pawns of society were entitled to a somewhat higher valuation; only Madame Mirabel had never made a study of such characteristics, and did not pretend to feel any interest in their exercise.

At last, having signalled to the conductor, she alighted at the corner of a rather squalid street, lined with the poorest sort of shops. Proceeding along this for nearly a quarter of a mile, she took a turning to the right, finding herself in a broad, quiet, ill-kept throughfare occupied by small houses of a singularly mean appearance. They were low and narrow; the paint was peeling off most of the doors, and it was evidently a long time since any of the windows had been cleaned. About a dozen weedy-look-

ing saplings stood forlornly on either side of the roadway, giving the place rather the look of an abortive boulevard, and the only sign of life consisted of a rakish-looking butcher's-boy, who was delivering a couple of mutton-chops at one of the houses aforesaid. And yet the inhabitants of this depressing spot considered themselves, and with some justice, the aristocracy of the neighbourhood. The street itself bore the grand, if somewhat misleading, appellation of Royalty Park; and at the further end of it there was a row of tenements, slightly higher than the others, called Augusta-Victoria Villas. Here lived the *élite*, between whom and the dwellers in the other part of the Park yawned a gulf of social distinction almost as broad as that which separated the latter from the denizens of outer barbarism round the corner.

To Augusta-Victoria Villas Madame Mirabel now bent her steps, and rang the bell at No. 3. After an interval, a sound

of shuffling footsteps was audible inside, and the door was opened by a very small and extremely sluttish servant-girl.

"Is Mrs. Jickling at home?" demanded Madame Mirabel.

"What might ye want, m'm?" replied the sluttish servant-girl, suspiciously.

Madame Mirabel pushed the door further open, and, without another word, walked past the girl into the house. A slight stir was heard in one of the back rooms, and the next moment a tall, thin, poorly-dressed and untidy-looking elderly woman came out into the passage.

"Why it's Julia, as I live!" exclaimed this lady, in a tone of querulous surprise. "Whatever have brought you up here, all of a sudden now, I wonder?"

"How do you do, mother," said Madame Mirabel, as they entered the room together. "Yes, it's not often I get the chance of coming. I can't stay very long either, for I must get back if possible before dark."

"Well, I must say you're looking bravely," remarked the mother. "Sit down, my dear, and take off your bonnet. You've not lost any of your good looks, Julia, and you always had a pretty taste in dress, though a bit too dowdy for my thinkin'. Well, your father was a gentleman—come of a fine old family, he did—and I was always considered genteel myself when I was in society. Yes, you feature your father, my dear—you've got his eyes, and his fine manners too."

She was a strange-looking old woman, this mother of Madame Mirabel's—with a thin, wrinkled face, a pair of eager, shifty eyes, and a querulous mouth, denoting a mean and somewhat grasping nature. Every now and then she would assert her dignity and superior breeding in ways that were pitiful enough, and wear her threadbare gowns with the stateliness of a Roman dowager; but the next moment the envious spirit would assert itself, and the Fates in

power come in for perhaps more than their due share of vituperation. Just now she fell into her most patrician mood.

"And have you been very gay lately?" continued Mrs. Jickling with her grandest air. "Balls and operas every night, I suppose—*I* know what a whirl it is. And which is the favourite theatre this year? I suppose you have seen that new piece at the Haymarket. The papers are full of it. Of course you've been to the Academy. Ah, it's many a year since I saw anything of the great world—you young folks must be havin' a fine time of it, no doubt."

"Don't talk such stuff, mother," said Madame Mirabel, rather brusquely. "You know perfectly well we live an hour from London, and there's no opera in Hampshire that I ever heard of. You're not worse off than I am as far as gaiety is concerned. Have you been out to-day?"

"I walked a little in the Park this morning," replied Mrs. Jickling, indifferently.

"The Park! What Park?" enquired Madame Mirabel, opening her eyes.

"*The* Park — Royalty Park," answered Mrs. Jickling, waving her hand in the direction of the dusty road outside. "Of course you pretend not to know where your own mother lives," she added, with an aggrieved sniff. "I don't say you've done bad by me, Julia, though there is some daughters p'r'aps as might like to see more o' their mothers— I can't say, I'm sure; but kin is kin whether or no, and I don't see what call you have to sneer at the mother as bore you and is living in poverty all alone, for all you've gone and married a grand man."

"A grand man!" repeated Madame Mirabel with a disdainful smile. "Poor Gaston—I don't think there's anything very grand about a Legation doctor, is there?"

"Belongin' to one of the oldest families in France, and got a competency of 'is own," retorted Mrs. Jickling. "I've 'eard it from your own lips, Julia, many's the time.

Not a bad match, my dear, for a poor governess 'way off in the East. How is the doctor, by the way? You did write me that he was better some time ago."

"Much the same," said Madame Mirabel, briefly. "He is stronger than he was, but it would be rash to count on his recovery."

"Ah," commented the old woman, looking keenly at her daughter. "Well, you'll be comfortably provided for, I suppose, whatever happens. Some folks is born lucky. You've not done so bad, Julia, after all, though it's a pity 'twasn't the other one you told me of—that Englishman, you know; I always thought you 'ad more of a fancy for him—and then to let him slip through your fingers that way! Well, it's poor work worryin' over what can't be helped, but you've got your life before you, and *if*"—

"I should like a cup of tea, mother," interrupted Madame Mirabel.

Mrs. Jickling rose with a most elaborate air of offended dignity, opened the door, and

called out to the sluttish servant-girl. Then she resumed her seat, and preserved a lofty silence till the tea appeared. Madame Mirabel, nothing disconcerted by her mother's frosty looks, made a few remarks upon indifferent subjects, and then, when the elder lady showed signs of thawing, opened the real object of her visit.

"Yes, I've no doubt it's dull for you here," she said, putting down her cup. "I suppose there are very few of the people fit to associate with."

Mrs. Jickling replied only with a tragically scornful gesture, intending to intimate thereby that the intellectual and social inferiority of her neighbours was beyond words.

"Ah, I dare say," said Madame Mirabel, with an air of sympathy. "Things were different with you once—but that's a long time ago. I wonder you don't prefer some pretty place out of town. You might have more society there, and it would be quite as cheap."

"The country is not to my taste," replied Mrs. Jickling, loftily.

"Of course, if you *prefer* this sort of thing, there's no more to be said," remarked Madame Mirabel. "Still, an occasional change is desirable. I should think you found London very hot and dusty at this time of year, and it has occurred to me once or twice lately that a short sea trip somewhere, perhaps"—

"I should 'a thought you'd 'a known your own mother better, Julia," exclaimed Mrs. Jickling, somewhat indignantly. "Do I look like a person to go gadding on a steamboat to Margate, or Sheerness, or any such low place? A short sea trip, indeed—no, thank *you*, my dear; I may be poor and I may be shabby, but I'm not one to go pushing about among a crowd o' common folk eatin' oranges and jam puffs all over the deck, and disgusting well-bred persons with their coarse jokes. Give me my own privacy, where I can keep myself *to* myself, and see no more of the

world than I want to. Not as a change mightn't do me good, as you say, but when one's means is straitened one hasn't much choice of places, and unless I can travel as a lady should, I'd rather by half stay where I am for ever."

"Quite so," assented her daughter. "But it needn't be either Margate or Sheerness. How should you like ten days or a fortnight at Lucerne?"

"What's that?" said the old woman sharply, dropping her affectations with ludicrous promptitude. "D'ye mean it — really?"

"I mean that if you would care to go I am willing to provide the funds," replied Madame Mirabel. "For twenty pounds you'll be able to travel second class there and back, and stay at some comfortable *pension* on the Lake, — of course I can't afford to send you to the Schweitzerhof. It'll be a change for you, and probably will do you good."

"Well, you are a good daughter, I'll say that for you, Julia," exclaimed poor Mrs. Jickling, delighted at the splendour of this prospect. "Switzerland — to think of it! And after months in this low neighbourhood, too; it'll be a real treat, my dear. Let me give you another cup o' tea,—do, now. I've never been to Lucerne, and they do say as it's a lovely place."

"I'm glad you like the idea," said Madame Mirabel.

"And what made you think of it, now?" continued Mrs. Jickling. "What put it into your head?"—with an incipient touch of suspicion in her voice. "You don't know anybody as lives at Lucerne, do ye?"

"Nobody," replied Madame Mirabel. "Why?"

"H'm," sniffed Mrs. Jickling, still more dubiously. "And it must be Lucerne, must it? S'pose I preferred Geneva, now, or Heidelberg, or some nice place on the

Rhine? I s'pose that 'd do as well, wouldn't it?"

"No," said her daughter, "it wouldn't. It must be Lucerne, and Lucerne only. You must give me your word for that, mother."

"You're up to something, Julia," said the old woman, with a very cunning look. "Let's waste no words. What is it? Come!"

"I wish you to do something for me at Lucerne," replied Madame Mirabel, calmly. "It really doesn't matter whether you stay there all the time or not, because the thing itself won't take you five minutes; so if you choose you can stay at Gersau, or Weggis, or anywhere else on the Lake. But the business must be transacted in Lucerne, and the best plan will be for you to do it a day or two before you leave on your return journey."

Mrs. Jickling's face was a study. Excitement, curiosity, and misgiving struggled within her for the mastery, and her eyes

gleamed. "You're a sharp girl, Julia," she said at last. "I suppose it's nothing very difficult, is it?"

"A child could do it," replied Madame Mirabel.

"Nor dangerous?"

"Not in the very least."

"What is it?" breathed the mother, whispering.

Madame Mirabel took out her porte-monnaie, and laid four new £5 notes upon the table. "Those are for your expenses," she said, in measured tones. "This," holding up a sealed envelope, "contains your instructions. You had better not open it till you get to your destination, if your curiosity can hold out so long. When can you start?"

"Whenever you like," was the prompt reply.

"Good; any day this month will do," assented Madame Mirabel. "There's no more to say, I think. Better put up

that money. Is that clock of yours right?"

"It's five minutes slow, my dear, and that's the truth," replied Mrs. Jickling with unwonted candour. "But you ain't in any hurry, are you?"

"I've nothing more to stay for, and a long way to go," said Madame Mirabel rising. "Good-bye, mother; you needn't write to me unless you choose — or, on second thoughts, you had better not write at all. Remember, now—*don't* write. I shall not be anxious." And then she went away without more ado.

That night the little servant-girl at No. 3 was almost crushed out of existence by the tremendous affability of Mrs. Jickling, who informed her that she was about to travel for a change in foreign parts. Old Miss Twistleton, the occupant of No. 4, was similarly overpowered by an intimation to the same effect, and readily promised to keep the key of the deserted mansion during the

absence of its owner, looking in every now and then to see that all was safe. To this lady, whom it pleased Mrs. Jickling to regard as a humble friend, she was unable to resist the temptation of hinting at important business which she could only transact in person; accompanying the statement with so many mysterious nods, and frowns, and winks, that the poor little spinster got half beside herself with curiosity, and looked up to Mrs. Jickling as more of a personage than ever. At that point, however, Mrs. Jickling was prudent enough to stop. Her chief weakness was an overweening sense of her social superiority, accentuated by the keenest dissatisfaction with the meanness of her actual circumstances; but she was far too quickwitted to let this foible get the mastery over her, especially in cases where a little intrigue or subtlety was likely to produce results to her own advantage.

When Madame Mirabel arrived at Haslemere Station that evening, Gerard, who had

been spending part of the afternoon with her husband, was there to meet her. She returned his glance with a bright, almost a tender, smile, and let him take her hand to help her out of the carriage. The walk home with her, along the quiet, undulating, country road, was dangerously delightful to the youth. She owned to having had a fatiguing day, and took his arm,—leaning on it, up some of the steeper slopes, somewhat heavily; and once, when Gerard laid his hand on hers as it rested there—so white, so soft, so shapely—she did not rebuke him for the freedom as she might have done, but seemed unconscious of it, until the hot, mad pressure of his fingers and the electric thrill which, agitating his nerves, and causing his heart to beat almost audibly with the impetuous rushing of the blood through his veins, awakened that within her which served her instead of a conscience. Then she very gently, very quietly, put an end to it. She began to tell him how she

had been to see her mother that afternoon—an elderly lady in feeble health, who lived the life of a recluse; how amiable and uncomplaining she was, in spite of her many sufferings; how they had talked together about poor Gaston, and his new hopes of life; and how kind Mr. Palliser had been when, on her way to her mother's, they had come across each other in the City. Gerard had never felt more utterly humiliated than when the conversation took this turn. The reproof was so delicate, so exquisitely pointed, so gentle and yet so unmistakeable, that his self-loathing for that one moment of insanity overcame all other considerations, and he thought he could have worshipped the woman who had so borne herself with something of religious reverence. They parted at her gate, and he went home alone —more hopelessly in love with Madame Mirabel than ever.

CHAPTER IX.

THE JUMPS INN.

MADAME MIRABEL need not have been apprehensive lest the fact of her journey to Stockwell should become public property. Mr. Palliser was not a gossip, and though he mentioned his meeting with her to his wife, in the most natural way possible, neither took sufficient interest in it to make it the subject of conversation outside. It was only when Gerard mentioned, at breakfast the next morning, that she had been to see her aged mother, that the trifling incident made any impression on their minds; his father being rather pleased at so unexpected a display of filial piety, and

Mrs. Palliser thinking how strange it was that she should have a mother living in so queer a neighbourhood.

A few days afterwards, Dr. Lancaster, driving in his light, well-appointed chaise, overtook Gerard on the Portsmouth Road. The two had become great friends. Lancaster was too shrewd a man not to see through the slight surface-priggishness of the youth's demeanour and recognise the sterling qualities which underlay it, while Gerard, self-disdainful in his better moments for his occasional fits of jealousy, found relief in treating the doctor in his most courteous manner, and displaying that true appreciation of Lancaster's high qualities which it was impossible for him to withhold.

"Will you drive with me to Churt, Palliser?" cried the doctor, pulling up.

"Yes, gladly," replied the other.

"Up with you, then," said Lancaster. "I've a patient to see there, but it won't

take me long, and then I want to go as far as the Devil's Jumps."

"Haven't you been to the Jumps yet?" asked Gerard, as they started off again.

"Never," answered Lancaster. "I've wanted to a long time, but somehow I've never had an opportunity. There's a curious old inn, too, I'm told. I suppose you're familiar with it all."

"Rather," said Gerard, smiling. "Are you fond of high art?"

"High art?" repeated Lancaster. "No —yes—I don't know, I'm sure. Why?"

"Only because there are some very remarkable specimens to be seen there," replied Gerard. "I'm surprised you've never heard of the celebrated Jumps Inn picture-gallery. There's a treat in store for you, that's all."

They went along at a spanking pace, chatting upon indifferent topics, and soon arrived at the straggling village which was their first destination. Dr. Lancaster

alighted at a small brick cottage, and disappeared; Gerard of course waiting for him outside. In about a quarter of an hour he came out again, mounted to his seat, and gathered up the reins, with a curious expression on his face.

"A queer case that," he said, nodding in the direction of the cottage, as they drove off.

"What is it?" enquired Gerard.

"A girl of sixteen or seventeen years of age, who has taken it into her head that she can't move. To all appearance she's as well as you or I; yet there she lies, day after day, helplessly in bed, and says she has lost all power in her legs. It's about a fortnight since I first saw her, and of course I had to examine her rather closely. Her legs seemed all right—as plump and muscular as one could wish. But nothing could induce her to make the slightest effort, and to-day I notice a slight, but quite unmistakeable, shrinking in the tissues. Her mother swears that she's bewitched."

"And there are no other symptoms whatever?" asked Gerard.

"Absolutely none," replied the doctor. "According to the girl's account the whole thing came on in the night. She went to bed as well as usual, and woke up just before daybreak with a queer sensation, she says—feeling as though she ended at her waist, and had no legs at all. And there she's been ever since. Funny, isn't it?"

"It must be paralysis," said Gerard.

"Not true paralysis," said the doctor, shaking his head. "I mean, it's not the ordinary paralysis which results from injury to the vertebral column, or pressure on the brain, or any such well-known cause as that. No, I'm inclined to think that it's more like a case of hysteria, which as I dare say you know takes very various forms. One often meets with morbid affections of this sort among women, and it's not so uncommon as you might think among growing girls. The trouble with this one is that she won't make an

effort because, as she says, she knows she can't. It's her mental state that baffles me. She's firmly and absolutely convinced that she *can't* move, and nothing I can say will persuade her that she can if she tries. That's the real trouble. There's not the smallest reason, physically, why she shouldn't get up this moment. If I could only get her to believe that, I believe I could cure her at once. She wants faith—and there's the affair in a nutshell."

"Do you believe in faith-healing, then?" asked Gerard, smiling.

"In such a case as this I certainly do," replied Lancaster. "Let that girl only become intellectually convinced that what I tell her is *true*, and she'll pick herself up as quickly as the paralytic in the New Testament. The fact is, the body must be acted upon by the mind. Just now it is this girl's mind that, being full of one obstinate and ineradicable conviction, keeps her body in thrall. Once shake that conviction, and re-

place it by a belief that she is wrong and I am right—in a word, give her *faith*—and you'd at once see the result. The mind would still control the body, but its incidence, so to speak, being set in another direction, the action of it upon the body would effect an immediate cure."

"How jolly it would be if all diseases were amenable to such simple treatment," said Gerard, with a laugh.

"I am sure that a considerable proportion would be, if only the experiment could be fairly tried," answered Lancaster. "Not all, of course. But even then the difficulty would be to produce the necessary conditions—to arouse the implicit faith on which the whole treatment hinges. If only that difficulty could be overcome we should see something. 'According to your faith be it unto you'—speaking purely as a pathologist I believe that that and similar expressions contain a very deep philosophical truth. Some day, no doubt, all this will be placed

upon a sound scientific basis; though whether you and I will live to see it is a different question altogether."

They drove on for a short time in silence, the doctor wrapped in thought. At last he said,—

"There's that case of our friend Mirabel, again. I wouldn't say anything about it to other people, but you're as intimate there as I am. Of course you've noticed how much he has improved of late?"

"Yes, I have indeed," replied Gerard.

"Well, there's some influence there that I can only guess at," continued Lancaster. "I've not got to the bottom of it yet, but I'm feeling my way, I think. I've a theory in my head about it that I'm trying to verify; and if I succeed I think I shall have made a very important discovery. The fact is—Hullo! what curious-looking hills those are over there!"

"Those are the Jumps," said Gerard, looking round.

It was a curious sight, certainly. From the sunny, fertile, luxuriant plain rose three or four abrupt pyramidal hillocks, covered with vegetation and rich grass, and, on the crown of the largest, a picturesque old cottage. They stood out, bold and striking, from the surrounding landscape, an admirable view of them being obtained from the winding road. Dr. Lancaster looked at them with great interest.

"A very strange configuration," he said, as he slackened pace. "I wonder what the origin of it can have been. I suppose there's some legend or other, isn't there?"

"Some absurd story about the Devil having jumped from one to the other," replied Gerard. "Here's the inn—you can hear all about it there. It's a pretty place, isn't it?"

"Charming," assented the other, preparing to pull up. "So this is the Jumps Inn. Now then for a glass of ale and the picture-gallery—I'm curious to see those specimens of art you were telling me about."

They descended from the chaise, and entered the little room on the left of the door, where they were welcomed by a most delightful old lady with silver hair and silver spectacles, who won the doctor's heart at once. This was the hostess. The ale was soon forthcoming, and very pleasant they found the cool draught on that hot afternoon. In a few minutes Lancaster remarked,—

"I hear you have quite a celebrated picture-gallery here, and I should very much like to see it. Are these the—er—pictures?"

His hesitation, as he looked wonderingly round the room, was not unnatural. He kept his countenance, however, admirably; and the good old dame beamed with gratified complacency as she rose briskly to the occasion and prepared to do the honours of her treasure-house to the two visitors.

It was certainly a wonderful collection—scarcely to be despised, indeed, by admirers of Botticelli and his congeners, but calculated

to excite considerable bewilderment in the minds of less cultivated persons. The paralytic attitudes, the wooden faces, the misshapen limbs, the staring, imbecile expressions, which appear to have been characteristic of humanity in the days of the Old Masters, were all reproduced with marvellous accuracy in the picture-gallery of the Jumps Inn, suggesting the deep reverence which must have actuated the painters for those most venerable models. This opinion was gravely expressed by Gerard, who asked Lancaster whether a certain interesting group of local murderers—two men and a woman, all of whom squinted rather painfully—did not remind him of a celebrated Cimabuë in the National Gallery. Lancaster, I am sorry to say, only replied by a muttered reference to Mrs. Jarley's waxworks; at which Gerard seemed, not unnaturally, much hurt. The murder of the sailor on the Portsmouth Road, and the subsequent execution of the assassins, were

also sympathetically treated; and the crack picture of the whole lot, for which a real live artist had offered no less than ten pounds down, was pronounced by both one of the greatest curiosities in art that they had ever seen. It was indeed no more than the truth when the visitors, in taking their departure, expressed the interest and pleasure they had derived from the exhibition, and promised to recommend all their friends to visit it without delay. The dear old lady was enraptured, and bestowed her most cordial curtseys upon them as they mounted their chariot once more and drove away.

"You were speaking of Mirabel," said Gerard, when they had gone some little distance.

"Ah! yes, I was," replied Lancaster. "I've got a theory about that case; only a theory, mind—so don't talk about it to anybody else. The fact is, I'm beginning to doubt whether his complaint is true consumption after all."

"How do you mean?" asked Gerard, surprised. "Is there such a thing as false consumption, then?"

"Nature is full of tricks," said Lancaster. "Her imitative powers are something wonderful, as anybody who has read Darwin and Wallace knows well enough. She seems to delight in cheating people with false appearances; and not only people, but animals, birds, and insects too. Never trust to appearances; that's one lesson I'm beginning to learn. Let us go back to first principles. What is health, to start with? Roughly speaking, a condition in which the principle of life, or vitality, is flourishing unimpaired. Consequently ill-health implies a decrease in vitality. In all men's lives there is something tidal—an ebb and a flow, so to speak. When you feel thoroughly well and hearty, it means that your vitality is at flood tide; and when you ail, or fall into weakness and listlessness and irritability, or, *a fortiori*, develop symptoms of a

still more alarming character, you may know that the tide has turned and the ebb has begun to set in.

"Well, now," continued the doctor, whipping up his horse, "it is clear that when a man is born with an inherited tendency to gout, or tuberculosis, or heart-complaint, the vital principle has a harder battle to fight than it otherwise would have. The body it animates contains an unusually large number of maleficent bacilli, or germs of some other destructive agency, which have to be counteracted. In such cases, of course, it behoves the patient to be continually on his guard—to choose suitable climates and modes of life, to avoid improper diet, and in a word to array himself on the side of his vital principle in its struggle to keep down the antagonistic element he has in him. But there are cases in which no such inherited evil exists, and yet where the ebb and flow of vitality is so abnormally violent as to constitute a danger almost as great as the other. For years,

perhaps, vitality is at the full, and the man is well and strong. Suddenly, and from no discoverable cause, the ebb sets in; vitality diminishes; and the effects are different in different cases, producing, in some, a marvellous *imitation* of some specific organic disease. Mirabel, for instance, when I first saw him, appeared to be suffering from acute tuberculosis. He had all the symptoms of it, externally at any rate. Yet when I examined him, and diagnosed the case, I failed to find the exact indications which ought to have been there. This puzzled me, though of course I said nothing about it. Now he is wonderfully better, and the symptoms themselves are rapidly disappearing. It is curious how a decrease of vitality will sometimes fix upon some particular organ, and produce all the appearance of a real specific disease. In Mirabel's case it seems to have affected the lungs. But now the tide has turned again, and if only we can keep up the flow of vitality which appears to have

set in, he will I trust soon be as strong again as ever."

Gerard was so struck with astonishment that for some moments he did not speak. "Well," he said at last, "if this theory of yours is really true, it ought to revolutionise the whole of medicine. It provides a fresh starting-point for investigation. Have you said anything to his wife?"

"I've told her nothing that she didn't know before," returned Lancaster,—"namely, that Mirabel was on the mend. But she seemed to have no idea of the amount of progress that had been made, and was surprised by what I said, though I didn't say nearly as much to her as I have said now to you."

"I wish I could see rather more deeply into this theory of yours," resumed Gerard after a pause.

"I can't see very deeply into it myself," said Lancaster. "As far as I am concerned it is a piece of the purest empiricism. But

we have one solid fact to begin upon—the existence, in the world, of a universal Principle of Life. It is found everywhere and pervades everything—the cause of all phenomena, the mainspring of the entire world-machinery. What it is, or where it comes from, or how it works, no one knows. But it is universally manifested, and to its different manifestations in acting we give different names—I mean the names of all the forces we see in nature. Gravitation, cohesion, attraction and the rest—these are all active principles, and the great principle which underlies them and from which they spring is Life, and nothing else. In recent years our attention has been drawn to higher, finer, and altogether subtler manifestations of it that we call by such names as electricity, animal magnetism, galvanism, and the odic force—all of which we are now only beginning to understand. The actions and reactions between mind and matter form one branch of this investigation, and the influence

of mind on mind—as unimpeachable a fact as that of matter upon matter—another equally important. One hears a great deal of nonsense talked now-a-days about telepathy, brain-waves, and the like. The nonsense will soon evaporate, and the phenomena themselves, which are true phenomena, be placed upon a sound scientific basis. Bah! we know nothing—nothing. We are, scientifically speaking, still in the Neolithic Age. It will be for our descendants to discard the clumsy theories of to-day, and work with finer implements altogether."

"Then what it comes to is this—that in the whole of nature there is really only one force?" asked Gerard.

"Precisely: and that force is Life," replied the doctor. "All others are manifestations of it simply. Of course the unity of force is no new theory in itself. Faraday suspected it, only he put it rather cautiously. He confessed the opinion, almost amounting

to a conviction, that the various forms under which the forces of nature are made manifest have one common origin; though to that original force he gave no name. I am rather more audacious, you see. I may be mistaken, but it is often our very mistakes which form the stepping-stones to the discovery of essential truths."

"I wonder what Madame Mirabel would say to all this," observed Gerard, with a smile.

"Oh, she half-believes I'm hypnotising her husband," said Lancaster, laughing. "There's no one like your thorough-going materialist for taking up notions of that sort."

"Has Mirabel ever talked to you about *his* favourite theory?" asked Gerard.

"Often and often," replied Lancaster. "It's ingenious and plausible—very. Yes, we frequently have arguments on the subject. The trouble about it is that you can't verify it. Clifford, you may be sure, would have repudiated any such deduction from his

mind-stuff hypothesis. Well, we shall know all about it one day, I suppose—all about that and many other things, no doubt."

"I wonder," said Gerard, in a musing tone, "whether if we did know all about it we should find life more worth living than it is now."

"Pooh!" exclaimed the doctor, briskly. "What business has a fellow of your age to talk like that? Of course life is worth living; or if it isn't it's one's own fault. I've no patience with such pessimistic views."

"And yet I've often wondered what I was born for," said Gerard, rather dejectedly. "I don't see that I'm any good in the world. Nobody can deny that suffering outweighs happiness; nobody knows what truth is; aspirations are formed only to be disappointed; crowds of people eager to work have work denied them, and are left to starve—the whole thing's a failure, as far as I can see."

"Just so; because you don't see far enough," replied the doctor.

"May be," said Gerard, briefly.

"All that sort of morbid discontent and cheap pessimism is very often the result of having nothing particular to do," continued Lancaster. "You're probably too well off; if you had to live on a shilling a day and earn it you might enjoy a healthier mental state. Of course we don't know what 'truth' is, as you say; but what of that? You remember what Lessing said—that if he were offered full knowledge of all the secrets of the universe with the right hand, and the opportunity of searching for them himself with the left, he'd choose the left. Complete fruition involves stagnation. I prefer things as they are, I must confess."

"You've been a prosperous man," Gerard ventured to observe.

"I've been a hard-working man, and it's been my salvation," retorted Lancaster. "I believe in the Gospel of Work. It's made

England what she is to-day. Oriental nations don't see this, of course; and the result is patent to everybody. Even the old Hebrews represented the necessity of labour as the primeval curse. Curse? Why, it's the greatest blessing the world has ever had. Don't you think that Adam must have been a much happier and more useful man when he had to take to agriculture for a livelihood, than when he was idling about a garden all day long?"

"But work won't prevent suffering," said Gerard.

"Palliser," said the doctor after a pause, "I have had more suffering in my life than probably falls to the lot of most men; and had it not been for work—good, hard, honest work—it would have ruined me. But I gave myself no time for brooding. I rigorously and systematically put all painful thoughts out of my mind; I refused to think of them; I took refuge in study, in experiments, in writing, and in the practice of my

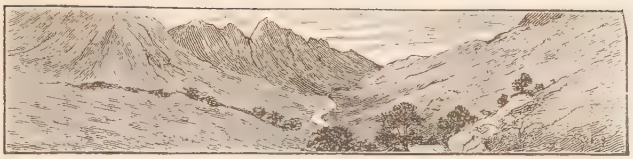
profession; and at last I conquered them. It's a good thing to work so hard during the day that you fall asleep directly you get into bed, for it is then that the thought of sorrows and troubles is most likely to occur and harass you—as I once knew to my cost. And there is no better remedy for this than work — especially work which has for its object the relief of suffering in others."

Gerard made no reply. He was conscious of his constitutional failing—of that tendency to melancholy and sceptical pessimism against which he so often struggled, but which pressed so heavily upon him every now and then. He was now silenced but not convinced, though there was something about the cheerful philosophy of his companion that braced him in spite of himself. I am aware that youths constituted as Gerard was in this particular are apt to be put down as prigs—by those, at any rate, whose ideal of youthful excellence is the brawny, cricketing, drag-driving, rollicking person with a large

appetite and a loud voice, the jovial philistine who has no nerves, and never 'bothers his head' about anything; there, there, we are told, is the true type of a young Englishman. Perhaps! The type has its uses, beyond question. Hewers of wood and drawers of water there must be everywhere, and, to such, brains are a superfluity. We cannot all be thinkers, and thinkers cannot all be optimists. Gerard was by nature a thinker and a pessimist; he had not yet found the secret of true happiness, and was searching for it, perhaps, in not quite the right direction; but the germ of the thing was in him, and some day was to sprout forth luxuriantly.

Meanwhile they arrived at home again, and Gerard asked the doctor to come in and have some tea. Lancaster accepted cheerfully, and the two alighted together. They had no sooner entered the hall than Mrs. Palliser came hastily out of the drawing-room, with a terrified expression on her face.

"Dr. Lancaster," she said, advancing, "I'm more thankful to see you than I can tell. Will you come into the breakfast-room? Gerard, you come too. There's something dreadful the matter with your poor grandmother."



CHAPTER X.

A LIGHT THAT FAILED.

THE breakfast-room was a small, rather dingy apartment to the left of the front door, where Gerard was in the habit of sitting when he wished to read or write without fear of continual interruption. It contained but little in the way of furniture beyond a centre table, a few chairs, a rather old but still comfortable sofa, and a book-shelf; but it had the great merit of being isolated from all the other rooms in the house, and the windows opened upon a quiet corner of the grounds occupied by firs and shrubs. It was therefore only used as a breakfast-room during the winter, when it

could be rendered warm and cheerful; in the summer Mrs. Palliser preferred the dining-room, which overlooked her sunny garden. A few moderately good engravings hung upon the walls, while on the table stood an old-fashioned double inkstand, flanked by a worn blotting-pad and a case of writing materials.

"I hope it's nothing serious?" said Dr. Lancaster, when they were all seated with the door safely shut.

"I don't know—I'm afraid it's very serious indeed," replied poor Mrs. Palliser, in undisguised distress. "The poor old lady has suddenly gone off her head!"

"Dear me," said the doctor, looking much concerned. "I'm very sorry to hear that. How did it come on?"

"It was just after lunch," replied Mrs. Palliser, unable to restrain her tears. "Of course she hasn't got up to breakfast for a long time past—she always takes her time in the morning. Well, we were sitting at

the table—the servant had just begun to clear away, you know—when suddenly she turned to me and complained that the vases on the chimney-piece were making faces at her. I didn't understand her at first; I thought I hadn't heard properly. But she went on again in the strangest manner, saying that the one on the right had been winking at her most impertinently all lunch-time, and that the other—oh, I can't remember exactly, but something about horrible grimaces that terrified her. I can't tell you the feeling of horror that came over me. My husband and I looked at each other in amazement, and I almost felt for a moment as if I were going mad myself."

"What did you do?" asked Dr. Lancaster.

"Well, my husband had more presence of mind than I had," said the poor lady, controlling herself with an effort. "He made some soothing reply, and removed the vases —you know those big Japanese ones we have in the dining-room; well, he put them

somewhere out of sight, and she seemed a little relieved. Of course he was terribly alarmed. Then she began to talk again, partly to herself; and really I'm not quite sure whether she knew who we were, for she rambled terribly, and—and—she's been like that ever since," concluded Mrs. Palliser, breaking down afresh.

"You weren't at home, I suppose?" said Lancaster, turning to Gerard.

"No," he replied. "I was lunching out."

"Is she pretty quiet now?" asked Lancaster, of Mrs. Palliser.

"Yes, I'm thankful to say she is," said Mrs. Palliser. "I did all I could to get her to go to bed, you know, when I saw how things were, but the poor dear got so angry, and put on such an air of offended dignity, that I thought it wiser to desist. I'm afraid her mind's quite gone."

"Are you sure she doesn't recognise your husband?" asked the doctor.

"I don't think she does, but I can't say

for certain," replied Mrs. Palliser. Then, as an irrepressible sense of the ludicrous struggled with her grief, she added, laughing hysterically at the idea,—"She seems to have entirely forgotten his name, and insists upon addressing him as Melchisedec!"

"Well, well," said the doctor, soothingly. "Palliser, just go and get your mother a glass of wine, will you? Nay"—as Mrs. Palliser made a gesture of refusal,—"you must be guided by me. You have had a great shock, evidently, and a little stimulant will do you good. Come, you mustn't allow yourself to be upset; we can't have you falling ill, you know. After all, when a person gets to her age one must be prepared for changes. Tell me one thing more. How has her general health been, lately?"

"Her health has been tolerably good," said Mrs. Palliser, "but she has seemed more feeble, somehow. She has not walked so much, and once or twice has complained of sleeplessness at night."

"Ah," remarked the doctor, thoughtfully.

In a minute or two Gerard re-entered the room, bringing a decanter of port and some glasses. Dr. Lancaster insisted on Mrs. Palliser drinking a glassful, which braced her nerves considerably; and then he took one himself, though he only sipped it. Gerard, he noticed, looked pale and shocked, and, at his suggestion, drank a mouthful too.

"Now let us go into the next room," said Lancaster.

They rose, and Mrs. Palliser led the way across the hall. She listened at the door for a moment, but no sounds were audible from within; then she opened it softly, and motioned the doctor to go first.

It was a very long, spacious, handsome room, tastefully furnished, and gay with dwarf-palms and other decorative shrubs; a great contrast to the one they had just left. Mr. Palliser, looking haggard and anxious, was pacing slowly up and down; while at the far end, close by one of the

windows, sat the poor old lady herself, to all appearance knitting as industriously as usual. But alas, the stitches came out as fast as they were made, and she held in her hands nothing but a tangled mass of worsted; instead of her usual placid look, her eyes were wandering and shifty; and as she plied her unprofitable task, and counted her abortive stitches, she glanced every now and then suspiciously about the room, murmuring incoherently to herself.

"Lancaster," said Mr. Palliser, stopping short in his walk, and grasping the doctor's hands almost convulsively, "thank God you've come. My wife has told you?"—in an undertone.

"She has," replied the doctor. "We'll see what can be done."

He walked up the room to where the old lady was sitting, the three others remaining at a short distance. At first she did not seem aware of his proximity. Then he said, in a clear voice and with a cheerful smile,—

"Well, Mrs. Palliser! And how are you feeling, this fine day?"

The old lady raised her eyes, and then withdrew them. Lancaster kept his firmly fixed on her, and then, after some further hesitation, she looked at him again.

"You remember me, don't you?" he continued, sitting down.

Her eyes fell, and she seemed struggling against some will, or influence, external to herself, which prompted her to look up. She tried to avoid Lancaster's steady gaze, and turned her eyes this way and that, shiftily; and it was not till some thirty seconds of this silent duel between the two had elapsed that the conquest of the weak will by the strong one was achieved. Then, painfully and reluctantly, she gave way.

"Come, you mustn't pretend that you forget me, Mrs. Palliser," said Dr. Lancaster, taking her hand in his firm grasp, and looking her full in the eyes.

"You're not an organ-grinder, are you?" said the old lady at last.

Gerard turned rather sick. He had never seen a person mentally afflicted before; besides, he was fond of his grandmother, and this sudden aberration shocked him infinitely.

"No, indeed I'm not," answered Dr. Lancaster.

"Nor the Archbishop of Hanover?" pursued the old lady, with fierce suspicion.

"I wouldn't be such a thing for all the world," replied the doctor earnestly.

"My dearest mother," cried Mrs. Palliser, unable to contain herself any longer, "have you forgotten us all? Don't you remember Dr. Lancaster, whom you met at old Nanny Goodman's, you know?"

"And pray who spoke to you, miss?" exclaimed the old lady, drawing herself up in sudden indignation. "This gentleman is an old friend of mine; he's come to pay me a visit, and I'll thank you to keep your distance. You've no idea what a flighty

little creature she is, Sir Anthony," she continued, turning to Dr. Lancaster. "You must make allowances for her ; she was very badly brought up."

This was too much for Mrs. Palliser the younger. Do what she would, it was impossible to suppress a wild desire to laugh. She hid her face in her handkerchief and turned away.

"And pray how long have you been here, Sir Anthony?" said the old lady, with more than her usual stateliness.

"I've only just come," replied the doctor.

"Ah, it's a pity you weren't here to lunch," resumed the old lady, nodding mysteriously. "Such pranks! such capers! such a turn-out! Two of them, you know—sitting on the mantel-piece, and making faces at me all the time. They wanted me to go to Hanover with them, my dear, and see all the mushrooms, and organ-grinders, and catherine-wheels—I'm told they live on catherine-wheels there—and they grinned at

me, and winked, winked, winked, till I thought the legs would have come off the table; but I wasn't going to risk *my* reputation, not for Don Quixote or Sardanapalus or any one of 'em, and at last Melchisedec got up and turned them both out of the room. I don't know how it 'll end, I'm sure, but I thought I'd just mention the matter to you, Sir Anthony, in case there should be anything wrong with the cabbages next year, and then no one will be able to say that it was my fault."

"You have done perfectly right," replied the doctor, very gravely. "Always tell me whenever anything of the sort occurs to annoy you again. But I think you needn't have any fear. I will give strict orders to the police to be on the look-out."

"I told you they were both gone, you know, mother," said Mr. Palliser, who was greatly moved.

The old lady looked keenly at him, as though in perplexity; Dr. Lancaster never

for a moment relaxing his firm grip of her hand, or removing his eye from hers.

"I dare say you did, Melchisedec," she said, a smile for the first time playing on her lips; "but you know, my dear, you're such a hopeless liar that it's perfectly impossible to believe a word you say."

Even Gerard smiled. Poor Mr. Palliser glared round the room, as much as to say, "Hear that, ye gods!" while his wife threw up her hands in bewilderment, and then produced that peculiar change of countenance which results from an equal impulse to laugh and to cry simultaneously.

"Come, then, we won't think about them any more," resumed Dr. Lancaster, with his most professional air. "You must try and keep quiet, you know, and not worry yourself about such things, which are quite beneath the notice of a person like yourself."

"Quiet, Sir Anthony!" exclaimed the old lady, tragically. "And how can I be quiet, pray, with that fidgetty minx prancing and

careering about the place from morning till night? There she goes, hopping and skipping all over the room—dancing here, pirouetting there, never an instant at peace, for all the world like a jackdaw in a Dutch oven with a bill-of-lading in its beak. Ah, don't talk to me, you giddy little mountebank!"—shaking her head threateningly at Mrs. Palliser, who, poor woman, more than half believed herself to be the victim of some dreadful nightmare. "I know all about your goings on; though what you and Melchisedec have to do in my house at all is a mystery to me—*I* don't know who asked you. What's that you've been putting on your head, pray, and how is it that you've taken out your eyes?"

"Marmaduke," said his wife, faintly, "this is becoming more than I can bear. Let us see if she recognises Gerard."

"A good thought," said Dr. Lancaster, still keeping his eye upon his patient. "Gerard, come and speak to her."

Gerard somewhat diffidently came forward, and stood by her chair. The old lady slowly turned her head towards him, and scanned his features with a puzzled look. "Ah, Marmaduke, my dear!" she said in a soft voice. "You're growing apace, my boy; you'll soon be a man now. Put your hand on my forehead, my dear; there's a noise inside it, a buzzing, you know, my dear, and it troubles me; ah — that's better; your hand's cool and soft, Marmaduke, and you were always a good son to me—so, so."

Her voice grew fainter, and the worried, excited look in her eyes gradually died away. Mrs. Palliser exclaimed under her breath—"Oh, my dear, she's taking him for you!"—and the doctor, willing to trust her for a short time to this new influence, went to a writing-table on one side, and, drawing a small case from his pocket, asked for a glass of water. "I'll give her a sedative," he remarked, "and then we must put her to

bed. There's too much excitement there altogether. A sound sleep will do her good."

It was some time before the old lady could be prevailed upon to take the draught. Not even the skilful blandishments of 'Sir Anthony' had the desired effect. Eventually, however, Gerard offered his assistance, and the old lady accepted it from his hands. Then Lancaster addressed himself to the task of getting her upstairs.

"Indeed I couldn't think of such a thing, Sir Anthony," she said politely. "I know how to entertain distinguished guests better than that. Why, we should have all the grasshoppers in the parish round us in no time. Think of that—why there must be millions of 'em you know, all chattering and whispering, and tumbling round and round like wheels—wheels within wheels, like the catherine-wheels in Ezekiel—so high that they were dreadful. I know all about them, Sir Anthony, and I must be on my guard

strictly on my guard, or they'll begin to buzz again—buzz, buzz, buzz"—

Again her voice grew fainter, and she fell back gently in the chair.

"Do you hear them now?" asked Lancaster, in a monotonous voice, keeping his eyes steadfastly on hers. The others all held their breath.

"I've heard them for years," said the old lady in a hoarse whisper, "and the wheels—the dreadful wheels—they are all inside my head."

"Then come with me, and you'll not hear them any more," said Lancaster, in the same concentrated tone.

He took both her hands and grasped them firmly in his own. She lay back, gazing at him as though half-fascinated, half-bewildered. For nearly five minutes did the struggle last, the tick of the clock on the mantel-piece sounding clear and loud in the dead silence. At last she gave way. For the second time the strong will triumphed over the weak one.

"O Sir Anthony! Sir Anthony!" she cried.

Then the doctor arose, and, drawing her hand through his arm, led her unresistingly towards the door. Mrs. Palliser immediately rushed upstairs to the old lady's bedroom, ringing for one of the servants. There was no longer any trouble. They undressed her hastily and succeeded in putting her to bed, murmuring feebly the while. In a few moments her lips ceased to move. The opiate began to act. A calm expression gradually came over the eager, shrewd old face, so worn and wrinkled; her eyes closed, and she was soon sleeping like a child.

Mrs. Palliser immediately went downstairs to inform her husband of the fact, while Dr. Lancaster remained watching at the bedside. She found him greatly agitated; Gerard, too, was looking rather white, after the scene he had gone through; and the temporary respite she announced was therefore very welcome. But of course it was

not in either Mr. or Mrs. Palliser to contain their souls in silence for very long, and the next moment they gave free vent to their distress.

"The most awful thing that has ever happened to me in the whole course o' my life!" burst out the former, as though challenging creation to disprove his words.

"*I* never knew anything like it since I was born!" ejaculated his wife, by way of capping his utterance.

"I shall never forget her look when she said the vases were making faces at her," remarked Mr. Palliser. "It horrified me as much as if I'd seen a ghost."

"I don't wonder," said Mrs. Palliser shuddering. "I felt for a moment as though I must be in a dream. And it came so suddenly too; such a dear, shrewd, quickwitted old thing as she was—the very last person in the world to have gone off like that."

"I don't remember anything queer about her lately," said Mr. Palliser, "do you?"

"Nothing, my dear," replied his wife. "Nothing whatever. Of course," she added as a recollection of the sun-bonnet crossed her mind, "she always had her little—er—peculiarities, you know. She was just the merest trifle eccentric, so to speak. But anything like *this*"—

The door opened, and they all turned eagerly to Dr. Lancaster, who now appeared from upstairs.

"Well?" said Mr. Palliser.

"She is sleeping beautifully," answered the doctor, "and will probably sleep on for the whole night. I shall expect to find her considerably better to-morrow morning."

"But—but what is it? What's the meaning of it all?" Mr. Palliser broke out. "We've no insanity in our family; she's been one of the most active-minded women I've ever known—one of the clearest heads—and now she suddenly goes off like this! It's a terrible thing for us all, Lancaster. Insanity in a

family's no joke, I can tell you. What can have brought it on?"

"Yes, you've no idea what a clever, strong-minded woman she was in her younger days," chimed in Mrs. Palliser. "The books she'd read, and the conversations she'd hold with literary men, you know, and the way she used to argue upon subjects of which *I* know no more than a child-in-arms — and then, to think of this terrible collapse! O God, preserve us all from a like calamity," exclaimed the poor lady, to whose excited imagination the possibility of herself, her husband and her son going all mad together now assumed an alarming shape.

"My dear lady," said Dr. Lancaster, reassuringly, "believe me that you take far too serious a view of the affair. The case is a very simple one, though of course it is distressing enough. It is nothing more than a break-up of the constitution. There is no question of hereditary taint. The old lady's

stock of vitality has held out bravely all these years, but no one could expect that it would last for ever; the painful part of it is the suddenness with which it has come, and the form which the collapse has taken. It might have affected her differently, of course,—as by paralysis, for instance. But it has immediately disorganised the brain, and the result is proportionately distressing. There you have the whole matter in a nutshell."

"But she'll never recover?" asked Mr. Palliser.

"No, that is impossible," replied the doctor. "In fact, this is the beginning of the end; I fear you must be prepared for your mother's death before many months are over. I think you'll find that she will grow weaker gradually, and die quite quietly at last."

The announcement was at once a shock and a relief. Mr. Palliser became less excited, and his wife shed a quiet tear or two.

"But—Dr. Lancaster," she said, with a certain hesitation, "I do hope the poor old dear won't always be so dreadful as she was to-day. Those horrible fancies, and all that wild, nightmare talk—I couldn't possibly bear a continuation of them. It would drive me crazy. My nerves at this moment are in such a state"—

"I don't think there's much fear of that," said Dr. Lancaster. "There was a good deal of excitement this afternoon, with a touch of feverishness—all that will be gone in the morning. You'll find she'll ramble a good deal, no doubt, but I don't think there'll be anything very painful about it. Of course she must have a proper nurse."

"Where can we get one—and how soon?" asked Mr. Palliser.

"I'll telegraph for one to-night, and she'll be here early to-morrow—probably before the patient is awake," said Dr. Lancaster.

"Thank you ever so much," said Mrs. Palliser, whose mind was now considerably

relieved. "I don't know what we should have done without you, Dr. Lancaster."

"You've been the greatest possible comfort to us," said her husband.

"Well, that is what we doctors are for," replied Lancaster, smiling. "By the way—it would be as well for some one to stay in your mother's room to-night."

"Oh, of course," assented Mrs. Palliser. "Jane shall have a shake-down upon the sofa—the woman, you know, who helped to put her into bed. She's a strong, sensible sort of person who can be trusted—and I don't think she'll mind just for this once."

In a short time the doctor left to despatch his telegram, promising to return the first thing in the morning. It may be safely said that, of all the family, the patient herself was the only one who slept well and soundly that night. Mrs. Palliser was seriously unnerved, and her anxiety lest the old lady should wake up prematurely and indulge in more 'dreadfulness,' as she phrased it, de-

prived her of that rest which sheer fatigue would otherwise have brought about. All went well, however, and when breakfast-time at length arrived they found the doctor's prediction amply and satisfactorily fulfilled. The old lady awoke calmer and better altogether. Her mind was still astray; but she no longer talked so as to curdle poor Mrs. Palliser's blood, simply rambling gently on every now and then, confused and uncertain in her recognition of persons, and to all appearance physically very weak. About ten o'clock the nurse arrived from London; a stout, pleasant-looking young woman, with quiet manners and a watchful eye; who gained Mrs Palliser's confidence at once. Happily, too, the old lady made no objection to her—did not seem to notice her, indeed; and in a few hours was in most satisfactory subjection. All of which Dr. Lancaster noted with great content, investing Nurse Osborne with complete authority under himself. The affairs of the house

flowed back into their usual channel, with the sole difference that one of the family was now isolated; and in a week they were all so much accustomed to the change that they felt as though it must have always been so.

And yet there was one member of the circle whom the incident affected in a very marked degree. Gerard, always inclined to pessimistic views of life, became conscious that his constitutional melancholy had been deepened, and another weight suddenly thrown upon his mind. Everything, somehow, looked dark to him. Reticent as he was, he was by no means unobservant; and there had been little indications, lately, that everything was not going quite prosperously with his father's affairs—frowns and troubled looks over the Stock Exchange quotations in the morning paper, unexpected 'calls' on shares, more than one failure of a dividend that had been counted on, and so forth; it seemed to him that all was not so sound as

it should have been, and in spite of his natural tendency to introspectiveness and abstract thought he was quite shrewd enough in more practical matters when once they were forced upon his notice. Then the strange and unhealthy attraction exerted upon him by Madame Mirabel was a source of constant torment. His 'inherited instincts,' as he called his conscience, condemned the passion rigorously, and in his stronger moments he loathed himself for having fallen so low as to love the wife of a man he called his friend. But struggle against it as manfully as he would, the passion existed and would not be quenched; and how, he asked himself, could life be worth living as long as he was the subject of so torturing, so dishonourable, a conflict? Then he braced himself, and vowed that he would pluck the evil tendency out by the roots, even though it should cause him agony, like destroying the nerve of a tooth; and would school his entire nature to lead

the life intellectual. The very day after he had taken his resolution he witnessed the sudden and irrevocable extinction of the brightest, keenest, and most cultured intellect of his home circle. No wonder that a youth so constituted should give in to the pessimism of his disposition, and cry that the world is a delusion, that everything is impermanent, that life itself is sorrowful and hollow, and that, if it is to be lived, the only chance of escaping bitterness lies in the annihilation of all passion, all restlessness, and all desire!

END OF VOL. I.

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